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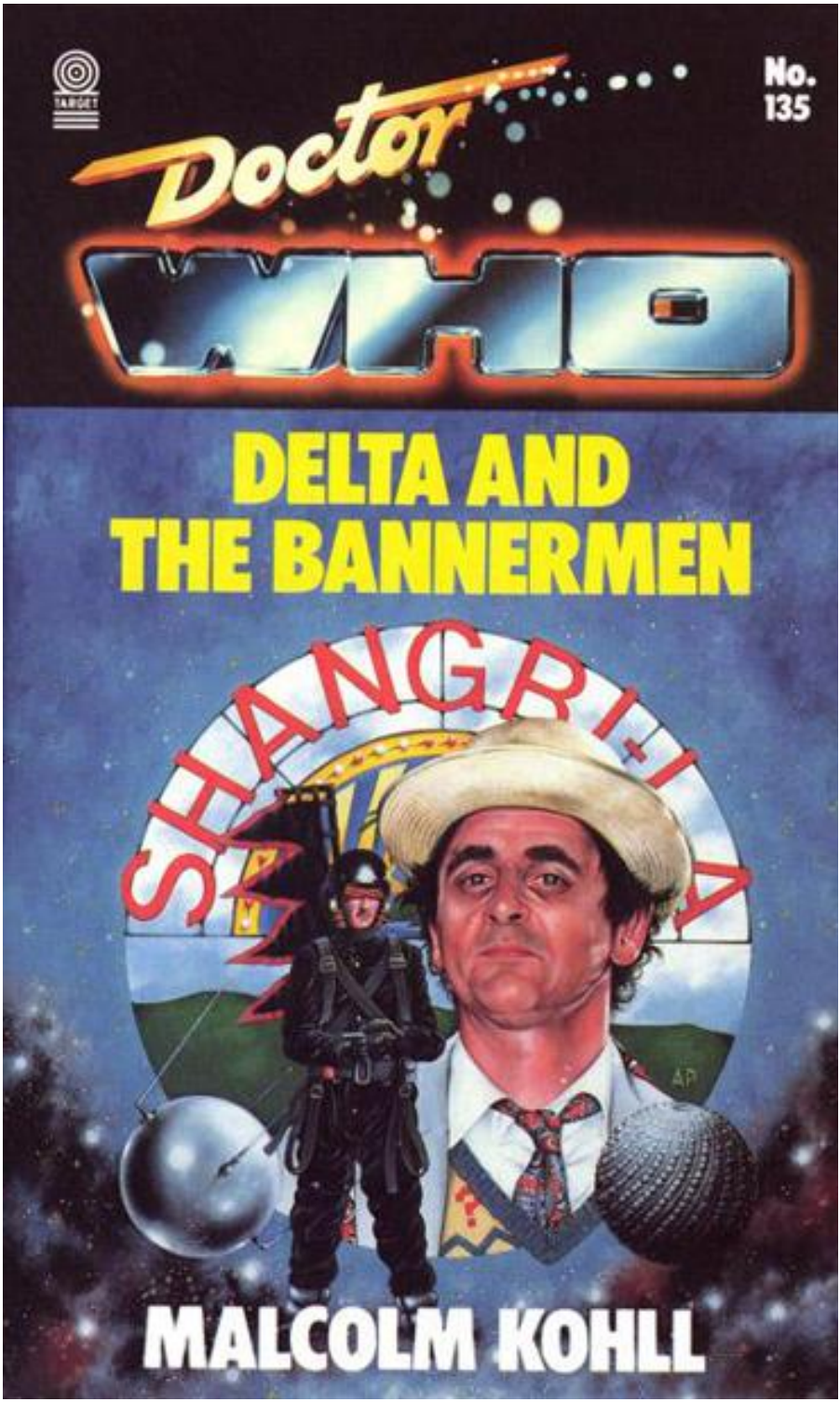
Doctor Who

DELTA AND THE BANNERMEN

MALCOLM KOHLL



As the ten billionth customers at a space tollport the Doctor and Mel

win the Grand Prize

– a place on the Fabulous Fifties Coach Tour to Disneyland, Planet Earth.

Unfortunately, they don't quite make it there . . .

Knocked off-course by a wayward satellite the coach party arrives instead at Shangri-la, a remote Welsh holiday camp.

But the peace and quiet of the countryside are soon shattered by the arrival of an army of marauding Bannermen soldiers, led by the ruthless Gavrok. They are tracking down Delta, the last of the Chimeron, with only one thought in mind – her destruction . . .

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DOCTOR WHO

DELTA AND THE

BANNERMEN

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MALCOLM KOHLL

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CONTENTS

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Chapter Thirty

Chapter Thirty-One

Chapter Thirty-Two

Epilogue

Prologue

The time traveller known as the Doctor chuckled to himself. Of all his multifarious incarnations, this was one of the nicest. He was, in fact, old beyond reason, but he inhabited the ever-present universe of the 'now'. Time, like a limitless ocean, spread out about him on all sides. He appeared to be in what could charitably be described as early middle age. He still had sufficient energy to scuttle around like a young man, but had acquired enough thoughtfulness to ensure that he was always taken seriously.

'One lump or two?' asked Mel, his bubbly young assistant, coming from the galley bearing a steaming tea-tray. 'Make it one,' said the Doctor. 'I can't abide too much sweetness!'

They drank their tea in silence. On the bridge of the Doctor's remarkable vessel, the hidden light source bathed everything in a soft

glow. The TARDIS, an acronym of Time And Relative Dimensions In Space, was due for a major overhaul. The faulty steering mechanism needed to be repaired and it was for this reason that the Doctor was taking it easy. Also, the chameleon circuit needed looking into – the device which enabled the TARDIS to blend in unnoticed wherever it landed. At the moment the vessel was disguised as a blue police telephone box, complete with a flashing blue light. While this provided perfect cover for Great Britain in the 1950s, it made the TARDIS stick out like a sore thumb whenever it went anywhere else.

'Would you like a digestive biscuit, Doctor?' asked Mel.

'Hmm? Oh, no thank you – I find them structurally unsound.'

'You mean they fall into the cup when you dunk them?'

said Mel.

'Correct,' replied the Doctor putting up his feet and draining the last drops from his teacup.

The TARDIS streaked through the vacuum of space...

Chapter One

The tollport hovered in space like a gigantic dandelion, infra-red flightpaths radiating from its central core in every direction. Inside the TARDIS the Doctor locked onto the landing trajectory and turned to the scanner as the tollport slowly filled the screen. Mel sat quietly watching the time rotor sigh and hiss through its rhythmic oscillation, eager to be through the tollport and speeding towards their next destination. She found the whole business of paying a fee to be allowed to travel through infinite space something of a paradox, but the Doctor had assured her that the fees which were raised allowed the Confederation to erect barriers at some of the more dangerous hyperpasses. When all was said and done, Mel would rather suffer a slight inconvenience than expose anyone to unnecessary danger.

The TARDIS tripped the automatic incoming warning device, triggering the loudspeaker inside the control room.

The tinny mechanical voice spoke its bland message: 'Attention incoming craft. You are approaching tollport G715. Please have your credits ready.'

The Doctor started rummaging through his pockets, searching in vain

for any credits.

‘It’s strange how in some galaxies these tollports spring up like mushrooms, yet in others you can go for light years without seeing a single one,’ he said. The Doctor drew a large spotted hankie from his pocket and dropped it on the flight deck before him. Bathed in a luminescent glow from the instrument panel the hankie ball appeared to throb with life. The Doctor carefully unfolded it, hoping to find a credit hidden within its folds. All he found was a fluff-covered humbug.

Mel was staring anxiously at the scanner, ‘Er... Doctor...’

The Doctor popped the sweet into his mouth. Unaware of Mel he continued with his theory: ’I think it relates to the way in which space was first developed – there never was a consistent three-dimensional planning policy.’

Meanwhile, Mel’s face had grown grave. Something on the screen was worrying her.

‘Doctor, something doesn’t look right,’ she said. ‘Only the landing lights are on. It looks abandoned.’

But the Doctor was by now so absorbed in his diatribe against haphazard planning that he barely heard her. ’Of course by ignoring the overspill from the fourth dimension entirely they sometimes built one port right on top of another, only realizing their error when there was an interface slippage.’

On the scanner the tollport appeared grey and life-less.

Mel’s tone had become urgent, ‘This is serious, Doctor.

There’s something wrong...’

‘I know it’s serious!’ he replied. ‘I don’t have any change.’ The grim-looking tollport now filled the scanner screen. ’Please take five credits from the kitty,’ said the Doctor.

Mel picked up the kitty, a striped biscuit tin, and tipped it out into her hand – empty! ‘There’s nothing in here.

Again!’ she moaned. A look of bemused interest flashed across the Doctor’s face. ’That kitty defies all known physical laws. We always fill it up and yet it’s always empty!’ He turned to the scanner and his

face suddenly set in consternation. 'Mel!' he whispered urgently, 'There's something wrong. Only the landing lights are on!'

Mel gave the Doctor a sideways glance which was more eloquent that anything she could possibly have said.

The TARDIS sank gently onto the target markings on the runway – three concentric rings on a concrete slab. The time rotor gave a final sigh and shut down as the flashing lights went out. They had landed.

The TARDIS had stopped outside a huge hangar with the toll identification boldly written on the side, in all the major languages of the galaxy. To the right of the hangar was a small tollbooth with the toll fees displayed on a large board beside it. The TARDIS was lit by a single harsh spotlight, the rest of the complex being cloaked in the inky blackness of deep space. Trails of mist blew across the cold runway, adding to the impression that the station had been sacked or abandoned in great haste.

The TARDIS door slowly eased open and the Doctor peered cautiously out. 'Hmmm, I don't like it one little bit,' he muttered.

'Me too. It's spooky,' said Mel, emerging stealthily behind him.

'Be ready to get back to the TARDIS at the first sign of trouble,' said the Doctor. He was straining to pierce the murky gloom when suddenly a brilliant spotlight flashed on, catching Mel and the Doctor in its harsh glare. A loud

'HALT!' echoed across the runway.

The Doctor shielded his eyes against the glare. 'Who's there!' he demanded. 'Why don't you come into the light and show yourself?'

The tollbooth and the runway became a blaze of lights.

Revealed in the tollbooth window was the Tollmaster, a scaly alien wearing a spangly jacket and party hat. He was blowing a party razzer and grinning from ear to ear, his lips curling back to exhibit a fine set of large white teeth.

He seemed in high spirits and gave his razzer one last blow before crying excitedly, 'Surprise! Surprise! Welcome friends. A thousand times welcome.'

The Doctor, realizing that danger was past, now became irritable at

having been the butt of a joke.

'I must say, you have a funny way of showing your friendship. I thought you'd been robbed by space pirates.

We were about to warn the authorities. Now, about the toll fee...' He started rummaging through his pockets again.

Although he knew it would be fruitless, he always thought it was worth making the gesture.

The Tollmaster dismissed the Doctor's efforts with a wave.

'Tonight is your lucky night. You are out ten billionth customers!' said the Tollmaster. Leaning out of the window he pointed to a flashing string of digits pulsing above the tollbooth.

The Doctor, however, had no plans to stay and join in the celebrations. 'Ten billionth, eh? Well, congratulations.

Now, if we can just settle up and be on our way...'

The Tollmaster, temporarily deflated, quickly interrupted the Doctor. 'But you've won our Grand Prize!

Mel, who until now had watched the exchange in silence, suddenly became animated. 'Oh really! What is it?

I've never won anything before,' she cried, hopping from foot to foot in excitement.

The Tollmaster, delighted at last to have a receptive audience, directed his answer to Mel. 'You have won... our Fabulous Fifties Tour – a week in Disneyland, Planet Earth. Back in time to 1959, a great year. I wish I was as lucky as you.'

Mel's face broke into a huge smile. 'That's fantastic! Oh, let's go Doctor – please say yes – I haven't been to Earth in ages. Oh please...' Mel turned her soft eyes to the Doctor, using her best Spaniel look to try and melt his heart and change his mind. She was put in mind of the sparrow trying to sharpen its beak on the rock of time.

But surprisingly it worked, because the next thing the Doctor found himself saying was, 'Yes, a week's holiday might in fact be quite pleasant, now that I think about it. A rolling green sward, a cool stream, birds twittering. Exactly what's needed, a large dose of

tranquillity.' He closed his eyes in thought; he could almost feel the cool breeze and smell the sweet scent of new-mown grass.

Chapter Two

The sustained fire from a squad of Bannermen soldiers sent rock chips flying from the rough-hewn walls of the Frontier. Huge boulders which acted as defence barriers for the Chimerons were almost obliterated in palls of sulphurous smoke. The battlefield was littered with dead and dying Chimerons.

Chumeria, known as the Garden Planet of the Universe, was under attack. The warlike Bannermen, after making their own world uninhabitable by polluting its rivers and atmosphere, had devised a simple plan – to annihilate the passive Chimerons and take over their world. At the head of the shock troops was Gavrok, who with his scarlet eyes and fierce nature had earned for himself, in a few short aeons, one of the most ferocious reputations in the galaxy; he wasn't known as 'Gavrok the Merciless' for any philanthropic endeavour.

Chumeria's inhabitants, the peace-loving Chimerons were soft and pupa-like with silvery green skins and vivid blue eyes. Having lived tranquilly for thousands of years the Chimerons were unaccustomed to battle and were helpless before the savage and relentless onslaught of the Bannermen.

The first wave of shock troops had all but obliterated the Chimeron defences and now Gavrok had only to mop up. He stood on a large shattered rock, an awe-some sight in his black military uniform. Slung across his chest was a powerful ray gun and in his left hand, raised aloft, he clutched a huge spear from which long black pennants fluttered wildly in the wind – the insignia of his empire.

He pressed to his lips a grotesquely carved curling horn, and blowing a low mournful note which echoed across the fractured valley, he rallied his troops.

There were only a handful of Chimerons left, and they were engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting with the Bannermen. In the front line was Delta, the Chimeron Queen, surely one of the most beautiful creatures in the Universe. Unlike her subjects she was more humanoid in appearance with a delicate translucent skin tone – more pink than green, the mark of royalty amongst the Chimerons.

Phaser in hand, Delta was pressed into a rocky gap with one of her bodyguards, watching in horror as her people and planet were falling

under the alien boot. Gavrok shouted across the clash of weapons and clamour of battle,

‘Take no prisoners. KILL THEM ALL!’ And raised the horn for another dismal bellow.

Delta had had enough. She was enraged at the death and destruction which the murderous Bannermen had brought to her beloved planet. She popped out of her hiding space and aimed her phaser. Gavrok’s horn exploded into a thousand pieces, almost knocking him off the rock with the force of the blast. Rage flashed across his sinister features.

Exhausted by the fray, Delta turned to her bodyguard.

‘Are you strong enough to run?’ she asked.

‘Where? They’ve firebombed every ship we have,’ was his desolate reply.

‘Then we’ll have to take one of theirs!’ said Delta, setting her lips. By now, she was well aware of Gavrok’s evil plan to exterminate her people, and although it saddened her to flee her stricken planet, she knew it was necessary to prevent the wholesale destruction of the Chimeron race.

With grim determination she pointed through the fug towards the squat black Bannerman fighter, bristling with weapons. ’NOW!’ she yelled as she and the bodyguard rushed from their hiding place. Gavrok’s troops opened fire on the fugitives racing towards their ship. Weaving their way through corpses and splintered rock they narrowly avoided the vaporizing rays of a hundred Bannermen phasers.

The Bannerman soldier guarding the fighter loomed up in front of Delta. She snapped off a shot and he slumped down as the energy beam tore through him. Delta and her bodyguard pushed him aside and ran up the ramp into the ship. ‘I’ll cover the hatch while you retract the anchor ballast,’ she gasped.

She bravely faced the door, hoping to keep off the wave of hostile troops which would appear at any moment. The royal bodyguard gave a cry, causing her to spin around.

Gavrok was standing behind them with an ugly leer on his face and a glowing blaster in his hand. Delta’s bodyguard was lying on the floor, a gaping wound in his chest.

‘You are the last survivor,’ hissed Gavrok. ‘But not for long. Move!’ He gestured with his blaster for Delta to go through the hatch. She slowly raised her hands as Gavrok’s ugly bulk advanced towards her, forcing her towards the hatch and certain death.

Suddenly a beam took him full in the shoulder, catapulting him out of the hatch. With lightning reactions Delta slammed it shut and spun the rotalock. Muffled banging and cries of rage came to her through the armour plating.

Delta turned to her fallen bodyguard, his weapon still in his hand. He was fading fast. ‘You saved my life,’ she said, crouching beside the mortally wounded Chimeron.

‘Go... get away... take this with you...’ he gasped.

Although very weak and in great pain he rolled over and produced a large silver orb from a pack on his back.

As Delta took the orb the Chimeron gave a final gurgle and died. A high pitched whining noise snapped her out of her painful reverie – the Bannermen were using a sonic drill and would soon smash through the rotalock. Delta jumped into the pilot’s seat and started frantically punching the controls. With more luck than skill the ship gave a shuddering groan and blasted off...

Chapter Three

Planet Earth. The blue orb was turning peacefully in space.

A Morris Minor slowly puttered down a narrow road meandering through a pine forest in South Wales, Britain.

Peering over the wheel was a skinny American with a crewcut and homrimmed glasses – Hawk. Seated beside him was a fellow countryman in a plaid jacket with an ungainly paunch rolling over the top of his trousers –

Weismuller. Their dress was highly fashionable for its time

– the time in question being 1959.

Hawk and Weismuller were more reminiscent of surburban America than the Welsh hinterland and looked strangely out of place. Within intelligence circles, the Welsh assignment was seen as being one of the most boring postings in the world – in fact it had become an

established dinner party joke. Unfortunately, Hawk and Weismuller were used to the privileged position of being secret agents under the direct control of the President himself, and this lonely posting was generally seen as a demotion. Yet they both knew that if they were conscientious in their work they would soon be home, and eligible for promotion once more.

The Morris stopped at a lay-by and the two Americans got out. Glancing nervously around, Weismuller rolled up his sleeve and plunged his arm into a hollow tree trunk. He produced a small silver aluminium can, similar to a film canister, with a tight screw-top lid. Inside the can was a message on a slip of rolled-up paper.

Weismuller read the message with a heavy heart and passed it to Hawk. Hawk read the note. When he had finished he screwed the paper up into a tight ball and eyed it distastefully. With a sideways glace at Weismuller, Hawk gave a sigh and reluctantly put the paper ball into his mouth. He proceeded to chew the minute mouthful, and after what seemed like an eternity swallowed hard and it was gone.

Satisfied, Weismuller started back towards the car, saying, ‘I never had a red alert before.’

‘Me neither,’ said Hawk, sucking on his teeth.

‘I reckon we’d better find a callbox fast,’ said Weismuller, all business.

Hawk looked around – there were trees as far as he could see. ‘Out here?’ he asked. Weismuller started the engine.

Half an hour later the Morris appeared over the crest of a hill. There, below them at the side of the road was a police phonebox. Weismuller cut the engine and coasted to a halt beside it. He produced a small codebook from the cubby hole and clutching it furtively to his chest, he got out of the car and crossed to the callbox. At the same time Hawk reached under his seat for a small brass telescope.

Winding the car window down he scanned the horizon.

Since his side faced only the callbox and a high privet hedge there was very little to see. The main sweep of the valley fell away in the opposite direction, a fact missed by Hawk since he was far too comfortable to leave the car.

Weismuller lifted the handset and dialled the local constabulary. Moments later he was connected. ‘Hello, this is a Code Eleven call,

please put me through to the White House... Washington, D.C. USA.'

The line cackled and hummed. Finally the phone came alive. Weismuller stood to attention. 'Hello? Yes sir, Special Agent Jerome P. Weismuller here. From Wales.

Wales England. Yes sir... yes sir. We'll get right onto it, sir.' Weismuller hung up, looking stunned. Throwing his shoulders back he strode over to the car and Hawk.

'Well?' demanded Hawk.

'That was no less than the President's right-hand man.

Whew!' Weismuller seemed very impressed.

By this time Hawk's patience was wearing thin. 'Come on, Weismuller, spill the beans. Why the red alert?'

Weismuller glanced nervously around, then leant forward in a confidential whisper.

'Says that Cape

Canaveral has just fired a space rocket with an artificial satellite.'

Hawk blinked in disbelief then started grinning. 'This is history in the making, Weismuller!' he said. Then his brow wrinkled, 'Uh... so what are we supposed to do about it?' Weismuller gestured at the expanse of sky.

'Surveillance, Hawk. It's our job to track the thing,' he said.

Hawk gave a low whistle. Weismuller got into the car.

The silence was broken by the grind of the starter motor, and they moved away through the pines.

Chapter Four

Behind the tollbooth was a vast hangar, entered through a labyrinth of passages. Dimly lit and damp, the passages reminded Mel of the underground burial chambers she and the Doctor visited on the planet Zoth. She remembered thinking at the time that the cold dank air seemed completely void of life, as if it hadn't been exposed to the energy of a living organism, however small, for aeons and aeons. That's what it felt like here, although she knew it couldn't possibly be

true. Peering through the gloom Mel could see that the walls had been decorated with murals. At one time they must have been brightly coloured, but the paint had grown dull and cracked over the years. The murals depicted space travellers from countless galaxies.

She recognized Solterns, Giboks and those funny little creatures the Wormese, who, without the aid of appendages of any kind, propel themselves along by the sheer force of their exhalations.

The Doctor peeled back a large flake of paint. 'Aha, just as I thought,' he said. 'Of a very inferior quality. This paint is barely two thousand years old. Lack of central planning again, I'm afraid. It's a wonder these places last as long as they do.' The Doctor shook his head and sighed deeply.

The Tollmaster was leading the Doctor and Mel through the maze. In her hand Mel clutched her small suitcase. 'Are we going to have a whole cruiser to ourselves?' she asked.

'No,' said the Tollmaster, 'You're going on a scheduled tour with the Navarinos – from the tri-polar moon Navarro. Squat hairy beings which resemble artichokes, I believe.'

'Won't they be rather conspicuous on Earth?'

'Not at all. They've gone through a transformation arch,' said the Tollmaster as they suddenly rounded a bend and saw the great expanse of open hangar before them.

A 50s streamliner bus with 'Nostalgia Trips' written on the side was parked before them. Beside the bus was a square metallic arch, surrounded by a group of people all in 1950's clothes. They were all trying to urge a round, leafy, hairy creature to enter the arch. Emitting shrill whistling noises it waddled towards the arch, hesitated a few moments and then retreated back to its original position.

Finally, with a mixture of taunts and cat-calls they encouraged the Navarino to go through the hoop to be transformed into creatures who would pass for humans on a day out. The Doctor looked somewhat sceptically at the leafy being, 'Is that one of the tourists?' he asked.

'No, he's your pilot,' said the Tollmaster.

'This should he interesting,' muttered the Doctor, his eyes resting on the side of the bus.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Mel.

‘Nostalgia Trips – the most notorious holiday firm in five galaxies. They’ve had endless disasters.’ The Tollmaster turning to the Doctor gave him a brittle smile.

‘They may have had a few problems in the past but that’s all been sorted out. This trip is going to be different. You’ll see...’ he said. The Doctor gave a half smile but remained silent.

Mel was flicking through the glossy brochure which the Tollmaster had given her earlier. ‘But the brochure shows a modern cruiser, not an old bus!’ she cried.

‘In fact,’ said the Tollmaster slowly, ‘it’s an expensive conversion. The chassis is from a Hellstrom 11, the latest thing in cruisers. The bodywork is just there to please the tourists. They expect everything to be original, even down to the transport.’

Finally the Navarino hopped through the arch. In a blaze of light it emerged as a chubby human in a wrinkled bus driver’s uniform. He turned to the Doctor, saying, ‘I’ve been through that thing a thousand times but I still don’t like it. I always expect it to malfunction just as I’m going through. That would be a fine thing, to end up half humanoid and half Navarino. Anyway, welcome aboard.

I’m Murray.’

Mel introduced herself and the Doctor. Murray’s face lit up. ‘That’s great! Knowing Nostalgia Trips we may need a doctor.’

The Tollmaster flashed Murray an irate glance. ‘That’s why the tourists like him – for his wry sense of humour,’

he chuckled sheepishly.

Ignoring the Tollmaster’s remark, Murray turned to the waiting tourists. ‘Come on folks. All aboard!’ he said and started shepherding the passengers onto the waiting bus.

The Doctor and Mel were the last to step up, but the Doctor turned aside at the last moment. ‘You go ahead on the bus, Mel. I’ll follow on in the TARDIS.’

Murray raised an eyebrow in query but got onto the bus behind Mel. ‘What’s the matter Doctor? Don’t you think the old bus can make it?

Take my advice and don't be fooled by appearances. This baby goes like a fireball.'

Murray shut the door with a bang, causing the wing mirror to drop off. The hangar doors started to slide open.

'Have fun now!' cried the Tollmaster, blowing on his razzer one last time as the bus fired up its engines and turned towards the black night.

Chapter Five

Delta set the Bannerman craft on autopilot and went to kneel beside her dead bodyguard. A tear rolled down her cheek as she remembered friends and family, cut down by the barbarous Gavrok. Just then the video screen flickered into life. There in front of her was the malevolent face of the Bannerman commander, his shoulder bandaged and bloody. Gavrok had an ugly smirk on his face.

'You cannot escape me. I'll track you down wherever you go,' he hissed.

'How many of my people are left?' Delta asked in a quavering voice. Seeing her distress Gavrok started to shake with laughter, a dry rasping sound that turned Delta's heart to ice. 'You are the last – there is nowhere you can hide,' he spat at her.

Delta's eye fell on the flashing green light of the ship's homing device. 'Your Trace Finder can follow the ship, Gavrok, but you'll never take me. Never!' She punched a button which abruptly shut down the video screen.

Desolately, she sank back into her seat, not knowing what to do next. Her concentration was interrupted by a mechanical warning signal: 'Attention incoming craft. You are approaching tollport G715. Please have your credits ready.' Delta swung round. She raised her weapon and aimed point-blank at the flashing green signal generator, knocking it out of action. Freeing the auto drive, she took over the controls, wrenching the ship into a tight turn.

On board an identical fighter Gavrok was leering at his viewer screen which showed the regular blip of Delta's craft. Suddenly the blip went out. Gavrok banged the device with a gloved hand. 'She's somehow cut the Trace.

Visual pursuit!' he ordered.

The ship's pilot activated the optical viewer. In the distance Delta's craft suddenly veered steeply to one side, disappearing completely from the screen. 'Copy her vector!' barked Gavrok at his long-suffering pilot. The pilot pulled the controls into a steep angle. 'You're overshooting, fool! She's ducked into that space toll!'

shrieked Gavrok.

Just then, unaware of the effect it might have, the synthesized voice cut in with its now-familiar litany.

'Attention incoming craft. You are approaching...' It never managed to finish its message because Gavrok's heavy fist smashed into the loudspeaker, silencing it for good. He glared at the pilot as their ship raced past the tollport and turned tightly, ready for a return run.

Down on the tollport surface the bus rumbled out of the hangar onto the apron and stopped beside the TARDIS. It was guided into position by the tollport navigator waving what resembled huge ping-pong bats. As the bus went through a pre-launch check the sky was split by the scream of a jet engine. Using maximum reverse thrust, Delta managed to stop her craft within metres of the cruiser. Her ship's hatch flew open and she sprinted across the runway to the bus, tightly clutching the silver orb. Delta jumped aboard, avoiding the searching looks of the other passengers. Murray simply assumed that she was a latecomer and continued feeding power to the engines.

As the bus started its run, Delta glanced out of the window catching the Doctor's eye. He was standing beside the TARDIS, his forehead wrinkled in thought. Satisfied with the checks, Murray opened up the engines to full thrust.

The Doctor blocked his ears against the high-pitched whine and clutched at his hat as the strong backwash enveloped him. There was a brief incandescence and a screech of afterburners, then it was gone. In the sudden silence which followed, the Doctor turned his eyes skywards, scanning the void, searching for a clue. Seeing nothing unusual amongst the constellations and distant star clusters, he entered the TARDIS.

Meanwhile, in outer space, the bus was heading towards Earth, its cargo of holiday-makers looking forward to their trip. The inky blackness outside the windows provided no clues as to their destination. A star cluster occasionally lit up the void as they hurtled through time and space. But the tourists inside the bus didn't seem to

notice; they were only concerned with having fun. The excited buzz of conversation filled the air as snacks and liquid refreshments were consumed at an alarming rate – the Navarinos were well known for their enormous appetites, Murray thought he'd create the right ambience for the journey by putting on a recording of Bill Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock'. He leaned forward to the microphone and addressed his passengers. 'Please keep your lapstraps fastened during the flight, and no dancing in the aisles.

Now, are we all feeling fine?'

'YES!' they chorused.

'All right,' said Murray, setting the time indicator,

'1959, here we come!'

Chapter Six

Meanwhile, on Planet Earth, Hawk and Weismuller had stopped beside a small picturesque stream strewn with mossy rocks and shaded with trees. Perched on the edge of a large rock, Weismuller was trying to operate a heavy-valve radio set, which was connected to the Morris's battery.

Balancing it precariously on his knees, he clamped the Bakelite earphones to his head as he tried in vain to pick up a signal from the invisible satellite. Hawk was up a tree, trying to locate the aerial wire as high as possible. Three curious sheep watched these strange proceedings, their dull faces turned towards the odd couple.

'That better? You hear anything yet?' shouted Hawk irritably, his shins already skinned from the rough tree-trunk.

All I get is 'Housewives' Choice'. I can't even find any doo-wop,' said Weismuller glumly. 'Here, you try...'

He took off the headphones and offered them up. Hawk slowly climbed out of the tree, awkwardly feeling every step of the way. Weismuller was irritated by Hawk's painful progress, and snatching up the brass telescope he extended it skywards. 'It's hopeless, Hawk. It could be anywhere...' said Weismuller gloomily.

High above them on the fringes of the stratosphere, an American rocket boosted its crude artificial satellite into a higher orbit, while the glowing metal fuselage dropped back into the ocean.

In another part of the galaxy, Murray was trying to get the bus passengers into a holiday mood. ‘Come on all of you.

SING!’ he shouted.

Mel, who was sitting beside Delta, joined in with the chorus, but out of the corner of her eye she was watching the beautiful, sad woman seated beside her. Someone else had noticed her too. Lurking behind wraparound black sunglasses was Keillor, a bounty hunter, his scarred cadaverous face revealing nothing as he stared at Delta.

Keillor was a highly experienced professional and sensed immediately that Delta was no ordinary tourist.

He had intended a week away from the stress of

‘freelance soldiering’ as he called it, but his mind was already working overtime on all the possibilities of the case. If something was going on he had no intention of missing out on it. He thought perhaps he could kill two birds with one stone, that is, earn some currency and have a holiday at the same time.

Earth appeared through the panoramic windscreen. The satellite, accelerating at thousands of miles per hour, was rushing straight towards them.

The singing had died down and Mel leant forward to have a chat with Murray. ‘Do you often do the 50s run?’

she asked.

Murray’s face lit up. ‘Uh-huh. I love that sort of thing –

the music, the haircuts, the baggy suits.’

Mel nodded in agreement. ‘The music’s the thing that attracts me,’ she said. She turned to Delta with a smile,

‘Where are you from?’ she asked.

Murray watched them through the mirror, straining to hear their conversation. ‘You’re not a late arrival for the Navarino party, are you?’ he asked.

Delta looked him straight in the eye. ‘No,’ she said, lifting her chin defiantly, ‘I am a Chimeron.’

Keillor, a few seats away, made a note in a small black book. Just then there was a spine-jarring CRASH! as the satellite tore into the front of the bus, sending it into a corkscrew dive, hurtling towards Earth's surface.

Passengers screamed and clung to one another in terror as Murray fought with the controls to try and bring the damaged craft around. Luggage ripped free of the racks and crashed down onto the hapless tourists. Food and drink filled the aisle.

Chapter Seven

Hawk and Weismuller, after several fruitless hours trying to pluck signals from the ether, had returned to the hillside phonebox. Weismuller, reluctant to admit failure, was still scanning the skies with his brass telescope.

'Forget it, Weismuller. Without any co-ordinates we're shooting in the dark.'

'Well,' said his partner huffily, 'it's not going to be me who makes that call. No sir! I wanna skedaddle out of this place. You know it's been so long I can't even picture May's face anymore.'

'So what's to complain about,' Hawk mumbled to himself.

'What's that?'

'Nothing,' said Hawk. By this time he was getting impatient. 'The boss said we were to share everything.

That includes responsibility, you know,' he whined.

Weismuller held up his hand to silence further debate.

'Just make the call, Lex,' he said.

Before Hawk had a chance to act, the strained atmosphere was broken by the urgent ringing of the telephone in the police box. Weismuller snatched it up,

'Weismuller here... Yes sir, no, nothing yet. Gee, that's too bad. I'll do my best, sir.' He hung up, looking grim.

'What's up?' asked Hawk, a nervous tone to his voice.

'Bad news – this satellite thing has gone haywire. The scientists think

it's gonna fall to earth somewhere around here. The Pres. wants us to find it before certain enemy powers get their mitts on it.'

Hawk collapsed the telescope and hopped into the car.

'If we don't screw upon this one then it could mean promotion. We could both be home by Christmas, Weismuller. Home!' With fresh enthusiasm he started the engine and they puttered away down the road.

Chapter Eight

Inside the TARDIS the Doctor was watching his screen in horror. The bus was spiralling towards the blue planet, impact only a few moments away. An emergency siren was whooping inside the TARDIS, drowning out the sigh of the time rotor.

On board the bus Murray's face was dripping with sweat as he twirled a defunct master control. 'Keep calm, folks.

We're just experiencing a little technical difficulty,' he said. Murray's knuckles were white as he manipulated his instruments, straining to take control of his craft. The bus shook more and more violently and he hoped that it had been built to the required specifications. If there was even a slight error in manufacture the whole craft could disintegrate under such stress.

The Doctor ran a few computations through his mind then started pushing buttons in a prescribed sequence.

When the last switch was thrown, the TARDIS started to shudder and emitted a loud droning hum. A powerful energy beam shot out from the TARDIS and locked onto the tumbling bus.

After a few moments the wild gyrations gave way to a more controlled yawing, and slowly the bus righted itself.

There existed in South Wales a quiet moorland valley with a single narrow track road running through it. The road stopped at a somewhat dismal compound of low, clapboard bungalows. Over the gate in green wrought-iron was the legend 'SHANGRI-LA.' It was one of the least-famous holiday camps in the country, but those who knew it liked it for its unspoilt location and quiet walks, and above all, its quiet restfulness. Its peaceful tranquillity was shattered, however, when suddenly, out of a clear blue sky, a tour bus thumped onto the road outside the camp gates, rocking on its springs and releasing a

shower of pyrotechnics from under its hood.

What was even more astonishing was five seconds later a blue police phone box materialized out of thin air beside the bus. The Doctor emerged from the TARDIS and crossed to the damaged cruiser.

Murray staggered out of the bus, still shaken. ‘Th-thanks, Doctor. We ran into a piece of space junk. What did you do?’

The Doctor cast a critical eye over the bus which had the small satellite still embedded in its front grille. ‘I simply applied the TARDIS vortex drive to generate an anti-gravity spiral strong enough to halt your descent.’

Murray sighed with relief. ‘They sure could use a guy like you at Head Office,’ he said. He looked around, his eyes lighting on the grey buildings nearby. ‘Hey!’ cried Murray, ‘This doesn’t look like Disneyland!’

‘It seems as if that satellite jammed your navigation pod.

As near as I can tell we’re somewhere in Wales,’ said the Doctor.

Murray squinted at the holiday camp. ‘Well, we’re going to have to do something with all these people until we get the bus ship-shape.’ The Doctor followed his gaze. ‘Maybe that series of primitive dwellings could be used as some sort of way-station,’ he said.

Mel joined them. ‘It’s a holiday camp,’ she said.

‘Perfect!’ cried the Doctor, ‘Just what we were looking for.’

‘But Doctor,’ said Mel doubtfully, ‘it looks... I don’t know... a bit grim somehow...’

The Doctor looked sternly at Mel. ‘You shouldn’t go by appearances, Mel. Often the most interesting people stay at these places. This is the REAL 50s, don’t forget.’

Something was happening. A balding man in a florid jacket was approaching from the camp. He was the camp’s commander who gloried in the name of Burton Burton.

He was pleased to see them all. ‘We expected you hours ago. Trouble with the old bus, eh? It happens all the time.

Still, it’s not far to the camp,’ he said.

Murray was not backward in coming forward. ‘Erm...

Do you mind if we rest at the camp until the bus is fixed?’

he asked brightly.

‘Mind?’ said Burton looking puzzled, ‘My dear chap, that’s what we’re here for!’

By now everyone was off the bus and milling around, thankful to have their feet firmly on solid ground once more. Burton clapped his hands for silence. ‘Welcome campers! I am your camp leader. During your stay at Shangri-La I will take care of your every need. My name is Burton, Burton Burton, and remember campers if you need anything, just ask.’ Burton chivied the tourists into a neat line, two abreast. Bewildered by the proceedings, they obediently fell into line without complaint. ‘That’s the spirit. Right, follow me!’ cried Burton.

And with that he turned and started marching back towards the camp. The passengers looked to Murray for guidance. ‘Erm, that’s right folks. You follow... uh...

Burton and he’ll look after you until our cruiser is ready to roll.’

The passengers, grumbling amongst themselves, set off after Burton. Mel and the Doctor, realizing there was nothing else for it, followed after the others. Murray took a last look at the bus then trotted off towards the gates of the camp.

Chapter Nine

The camp was built around a gravel square, with the large dining hall at one end, the shower and toilet blocks at the other, and behind the main buildings a children’s playground. Burton led everyone into the square where they stood about crunching gravel underfoot until Burton signalled silence.

‘Welcome to Shangri-La where your dreams come true!

Now, as always it’s two to a cabin and mealtimes are clearly displayed behind the cabin door. But just in case there is any confusion breakfast is at eight, lunch at one and supper at six. Eating together is all part of the camp fun so do try and be prompt. Over there is the dining hall. Any questions? Splendid! I’ll show you to your cabins then.’

Burton was already moving towards the first row of cabins before the Navarinos realized that they were supposed to follow him. Picking up their luggage they ran to catch him up. Mel and Delta were walking at the back of the queue as Burton allocated cabins to various people. Keillor took a last glance at Delta just before he entered his cabin, accompanied by a plump Navarino dressed like a Teddy boy.

Mel and Delta both heard it at the same moment –

someone softly whistling 'Why do Fools Fall in Love?'

The whistler was Billy, the camp mechanic, tinkering with an old waterpump. He was good-looking with his sharp quiff and white T-shirt and jeans. Nonchalantly he watched the new arrivals as they were herded into the cabins.

Beneath his apparent indifference his heart was beating fast – Delta was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He noted which cabin she and Mel entered.

Mel looked around the small hut with its narrow twin beds and single dresser, and her heart sank. Burton waved expansively at the rudimentary accommodation. 'You'll find a list of our rules and regulations behind the door.

Any questions? Splendid!' Before Mel could reply Burton had left. Mel smiled at Delta who was fighting back the tears.

'Not that it makes much difference,' said Mel cheerily,

'but which bed would you like?' Delta seemed not to have heard. Mel continued, 'Well, I don't really mind. One seems as good as the other.' And she plumped her suitcase onto the bed nearest to her. Delta carefully put the silver sphere onto the cover of the other bed and sank down. She covered her face with her hands and started to sob gently.

'Look, I know it isn't like the brochure but don't be too upset,' said Mel trying to cheer her up.

Delta sadly raised her head. 'How long are we going to be here?' she asked.

'Just till the bus is fixed,' said Mel.

'And then?'

‘Then we’ll go to Disneyland, I suppose,’ said Mel.

Delta sighed wearily. ‘It might give me enough time,’

she said, a note of hope creeping into her voice.

Mel was becoming more uncomfortable by the minute.

She decided to try and draw Delta out. ‘I can see something’s bothering you. Do you want to talk about it?’

Delta gave Mel a cool appraising glance, then shook her head. ‘No.’

Delta reached under her tunic and produced a phaser gun which she stripped and checked. Mel gave her a nervous smile and started unpacking her clothes. Delta sat on her bed and loaded another round into the phaser’s magazine.

Chapter Ten

The group of holiday-makers following Burton had dwindled to Murray and the Doctor. Burton steered them towards the pump where Billy was just finishing. He pointed to the cabin at the very end of the row. ‘Your cabin is at the end. Now, if you want some help with your bus I’m sure our young mechanic would be pleased to assist.

See you at lunch!’ With that Burton marched away at a brisk clip.

Billy straightened up, wiping his hands on a greasy bit of cotton waste. He offered his outspread hand to Murray then the Doctor as they all introduced themselves. ‘Old man Burton said there was something wrong with your bus, is that right?’ asked Billy.

Murray nodded, ‘We hit this low orbital satellite which jammed the navipod and here we are!’

Billy looked suspiciously at Murray, convinced that his leg was being pulled. ‘Well,’ said Billy, sucking on his teeth, ‘if it’s got four wheels I can fix it.’

‘It shouldn’t take too long to repair – I have a spare Quarb crystal on the TARDIS,’ said the Doctor. Billy now looked at the Doctor, he wondered what kind of a joke these two guys were trying to pull. However, they didn’t laugh – in fact they set off for the bus, in deadly earnest.

Billy shook his head, picked up his toolbag, and followed after them.

When he reached the bus the bonnet was already open and Murray and the Doctor were reaching into the engine bay. Billy took a peek and gave a low whistle – instead of a greasy old diesel engine, there was a high-tech jet burner with twin boosters nestling in the engine space.

'I've NEVER seen an engine like that!' said Billy.

Murray grunted, 'She's a Hellstrom Fireball, capable of Warp 5 with a good tailwind.'

Billy glanced around and saw a police phone box standing a few feet away. He was now convinced that the whole thing was some kind of elaborate prank, but the other two were working on the bus with fierce concentration.

The Doctor was tugging at something. Finally he appeared with the small satellite, painted with the Stars and Stripes. 'This is the cause of the problem – an extremely crude low-orbital satellite capable of only the most rudimentary radio transmissions,' he said.

Murray took the satellite and tied it onto the bus's roof-rack, then laboriously made a note in his book. 'Thanks Doctor. I have to fill in an accident report or Head Office will withdraw my licence. As it is, it's touch and go.'

Billy was still having trouble believing his eyes. 'Uh...

exactly what is it you're trying to do?' he said.

The Doctor pointed at a small black box with a glowing crystal sticking out of its centre. 'That's the navipod. If we can unbolt it then we can replace the crystal.'

Billy picked up a spanner and dived into the engine bay.

The Doctor entered the TARDIS, to appear a moment later carrying a small reinforced case. Billy emerged from the engine hay triumphantly clutching the black navipod.

'Well done,' said the Doctor, 'Now, inside this box is the only Quarb crystal this side of the Softel Nebula.'

'It was really lucky that you came along, Doctor,'

whispered Murray confidentially. 'Head Office said this was my last

chance to make good.' Murray carefully started unscrewing the lid of the navipod and took out the broken crystal. He gently lifted the new crystal from its shock-proof case and fitted it into the device. The lid was screwed back on and it was ready to be refitted.

'Carefully does it now,' said the Doctor.

'Here, I'll fit it,' said Billy. He and Murray bent into the engine bay and started spannering.

A red scooter with white leg shields pulled up and stopped beside the bus. The rider wore black jeans and a denim jacket. She took off her helmet and shook down her hair. 'Hi Billy,' she said.

Billy barely glanced up. 'Hi Rachel. This is Murray and the Doctor.'

Ray grimaced at being called by her full name. 'Please call me Ray. Do you lads want a hand?'

Murray popped a grease-spattered face over the wing of the bus, 'You haven't by any chance got a one-and-five-eighths socket, have you?' Ray dug in her shoulder bag and produced the gleaming wrench. Murray was astonished and blinked several times before taking it from her and resuming work.

The Doctor had noted the transaction with interest. 'Do you always carry a full set of tools around with you?' he asked.

'It's what Billy taught me – always be prepared,' said Ray with a shy smile.

'Absolutely. A stitch in time is worth two in space,' said the Doctor. Ray grinned at him then turned back to Billy.

It was obvious that she thought the world of him. Billy, however, appeared not to even notice that she was a girl.

Murray was grunting as he applied the final turn of the wrench to the navipod. There was a sudden mechanical CLANG! and he rose out of the engine hay, his face white with shock. In his hand he held the two halves of the broken crystal. 'I've broken it! The new crystal – no licence, no job, no future!' he wailed.

'There will always be a future,' said the Doctor. 'If you think it would help I could transport everyone in the TARDIS.'

Murray was looking doleful, ‘Thanks Doctor, but a captain never leaves his ship.’

The Doctor nodded understandingly. ‘There is another alternative,’ he said, ‘I can accelerate growth in the thermobooster and create a new crystal in about 24 hours.’

Murray’s face lit up. ‘That’s fantastic! You’ve saved my bacon, Doctor. I can’t see any problem with staying here for 24 hours.’

Ray smiled brightly, ‘Great. I’ll see you all at the dance then.’

Murray was snapping his fingers with excitement. ‘A dance – with live music?’ he blurted.

‘Uh-huh,’ said Ray, ‘Billy here plays great rock’n’roll.’

‘Sounds too good to miss,’ said Murray.

‘Okay, see you later, alligator,’ said Ray, starting her scooter and driving away.

Murray turned to the Doctor, ‘I just love all that 50s talk,’ he said.

The Doctor watched her putter away. ‘A most personable young woman, that. Practical too. She seems extremely fond of you, Billy.’

Billy nodded. ‘She’s okay. Like my little sister, you know.’ He started packing up his tools. ‘If you don’t need me for anything else I’ll go and wash up for dinner,’ he said.

Murray nodded. ‘Good idea. All this spannering really works up an appetite.’

‘I don’t know much about spanners but I used to have a sonic screwdriver,’ said the Doctor, as they all turned and started walking towards the camp.

Chapter Eleven

Mel had just about finished unpacking when a loud metallic gonging shook the walls. Delta sprang from the bed and took up a stance beside the window, ready to shoot anything that moved. ‘What’s that?’ she hissed.

Mel, trying to be calm, smiled bravely. ‘It’s only the dinner gong,’ she said.

Delta looked at her suspiciously, then cautiously peered through the window. She seemed to sag as the tension left her and pushed the phaser into her tunic pocket. Mel was relieved to see the weapon disappear, but she couldn't help thinking that she may have been better off sharing a cabin with a Navarino. Even though their constant chat tended to irritate her, it was a lot more relaxing than cohabiting with a gun-toting Chimeron.

Mel decided that she would have to be straight with Delta. 'As soon as I've finished unpacking I think I'll go and get something to eat,' she said, testing the water.

Delta narrowed her eyes. 'Can you be trusted?' she asked.

'Oh yes! Utterly! Discretion is my middle name,' said Mel, nervously sidling towards the door.

Delta decided that she was all right and sat down once more on the bed. Mel left, trying to look as unconcerned as possible.

Outside the cabins Billy was working on his gleaming black motorbike and sidecar. Two tourists were watching him in fascination. 'What is it?' asked one.

Billy looked up. 'This here's a Vincent Black Shadow –

finest motorcycle in the world.'

The other tourist, still not sure of its function, asked,

'But what does it do?'

'Oh, about 130 on a good day. That's without the sidecar, of course,' said Billy.

The first tourist was still mystified. 'A hundred and thirty WHAT?'

Billy was getting exasperated. 'Miles per hour, of course!' he said.

The second tourist's face lit up. 'I see! It's a form of transport.'

Billy had seen some strange tours, but this one was really shaping up to be the weirdest.

Mel rushed past on her way to the dining hall eager to tell the Doctor all about Delta. When she got there the Doctor had already arrived and was sitting alone at a table, picking at his food. Mel sat beside

him and promptly took an apple from his plate. A few moments later Delta entered and sat, a solitary figure, cool and aloof at a corner table.

However, her entrance was noted by someone other than Mel and the Doctor. Keillor stared at her from behind his dark glasses, the cogs in his brain slowly turning over.

‘There’s something odd going on here, Doctor,’

whispered Mel urgently.

‘Well, it’s home – at least until the navipod is fixed.

Speaking personally, I rather like it,’ replied the Doctor cheerfully.

‘Well, I’m determined to try and enjoy myself. If I can...’

said Mel, trying not to appear ungrateful.

‘Excellent!’ said the Doctor.

Mel smiled sweetly at the Doctor. Suddenly, her expression changed and with eyes like saucers she blurted out, ‘She’s got a gun!’

‘Really! A photon blaster?’ asked the Doctor, always keen on specifics.

Mel was less fussy. ‘I didn’t check the type! And that’s not all – she’s very on edge. It’s as if she has some terrible secret,’ she said.

‘Have you spoken to her at all?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Of course, but she’s totally withdrawn. And guns make me nervous,’ said Mel.

Just then Billy entered the dining hall and picked up a tray. He joined the queue for food, and afterwards crossed to Delta’s table and sat down. She glanced up and Billy smiled – there was a brief flicker between them before Delta pushed aside her untouched meal and, quickly rising to her feet, she left. Billy watched her go, then stabbed his fried egg. He was angry with himself and ran over the last few minutes in his mind. He hoped that he hadn’t scared her off by appearing too forward. He could tell that he made her nervous. But then again, he’d only smiled at her.

Billy would have to wait and see.

Mel and the Doctor also saw her leave. ‘You know Mel, I think you could be right. Your charming roommate may well be in danger,’ said the Doctor.

‘From someone here?’ asked Mel.

‘That’s what we have to discover,’ he replied, throwing a suspicious glance at Keillor.

Burton had got to his feet and was tapping a glass for silence. When the noisy clamour had died down he made an announcement. ‘This is to remind you that tonight we are having our getting-to-know-you dance. From eight till late. See you all there!’ he said and sat down.

Mel had finished her apple and prepared to leave. ‘Try and get her to come to the dance,’ said the Doctor. ‘She might be willing to speak to me later on.’

‘I’ll see what I can do,’ said Mel, looking none-too-confident about her chances of success.

The tollport was in chaos. Gavrok and a couple of his thugs had ransacked the place. The Tollmaster was quaking in his boots. Gavrok unsheathed a small zap gun from its holster and put it to the Tollmaster’s head. ‘For the last time – tell me her destination and I’ll let you live,’ hissed Gavrok.

‘It’s... it’s strictly confidential,’ mumbled the Tollmaster, barely audible.

Gavrok cocked his weapon. ‘I am getting tired of all this. Tell me now!’ he said.

The Tollmaster nervously licked his lips. ‘They were going... they were going to Disneyland on Planet Earth when they hit a satellite. They were blown off course – I don’t know where.’

A cold smile played across Gavrok’s face. ‘You can’t do any better than that?’ he demanded.

‘Please,’ said the Tollmaster, shaking like a leaf, ‘I honestly don’t know anything!’

This answer seemed to convince Gavrok who suddenly relaxed and patted the Tollmaster on the shoulder. ‘I can see you’ve done your best,’ said Gavrok. In the next instant he spun around and shot the

Tollmaster who slumped onto the floor, a look of surprise still on his face.

Gavrok's henchmen gathered around. Gavrok's face was dark. 'We have wasted enough time here,' he said, turning to his ship's Captain. 'Plot a course for Earth. I want every informer throughout the Galaxy on the look-out for her.'

They stamped out of the Tollshed and into their waiting fighter. The captain punched a code into the ship's computer and it lifted off, destined for a small blue planet where a rock'n'roll band was timing up.

Chapter Twelve

The dining room at Shangri-La had been transformed into a dance hall for the get-to-know-you dance. At one end was a small raised platform. Running the full length of the makeshift stage was a banner saying 'SHANGRI-LA 1959'.

Streamers and brightly coloured balloons hung from the rafters and the place was packed with redcoats and tourists.

Up on stage was Billy's band, the Lorells. Billy had rigged up an old air raid warning horn to his amplifier and could pump out the greatest amount of wattage of any band between Pontardulais and Llandovery. The band was tuning up for their first number while Billy checked the connections under the keen eye of the Doctor.

'How do you like it, Doctor?' he asked. 'I built it myself.

With spare parts form the war.' The decibels were already rising.

'How appropriate,' shouted the Doctor through the cacophony.

'What?' said Billy, cupping his ear.

'I said, for a primative piece of technology, it certainly can deliver the decibels!'

'That's what rock'n'roll is all about,' said Billy, jumping up onto the stage and picking up this guitar.

The band launched into their first number, 'Singing the Blues', and almost immediately the floor was filled with writhing, swirling, sweating bodies. The Doctor pushed his way through the throng

towards the cool air coming from the open door.

Murray, jiving with a lopsided grin on his face, collared the Doctor before he reached the door. ‘This is great,’ he enthused, ‘the 50s nights on Navarro were never like this!’

Just then Mel and Delta appeared, both dressed to the nines. Murray needed no further encouragement. He grabbed Mel by the hand, dragging her into the centre of the dancefloor and the writhing mass of bodies. Murray, a look of pure ecstasy on his face, proved himself to be no mean dancer and whirled Mel around at a giddy speed.

Delta, suddenly left alone, felt the Doctor’s gaze on her.

She held his eye for a long moment, then was gone, pushing through the crowd to the front. The Doctor watched her go, a frown on his face. Gradually he became aware of someone standing at his side.

Ray, wearing a rah-rah skirt and scarlet top, had been transformed. She smiled at him. ‘See Doctor, it’s not all that bad now, is it?’

The Doctor was momentarily at a loss for words, ‘I...

uh... no, not at all. It’s rather nice, in fact.’

‘Come on, let’s go to the front. I can’t see Billy from here,’ said Ray.

‘Have you and Billy known each other for a long time?’

asked the Doctor.

‘Since we were kids. I even learned all about motorbikes in the hope that it’d make him notice me. But it doesn’t seem to have made a blind bit of difference,’ said Ray, looking at her shoes.

The Doctor smiled. ‘I thought we were going to the front,’ he said, taking her arm and guiding her through the crowd.

The song had ended and everyone was applauding. Billy stepped up to the microphone. ‘Thanks folks. And now a romantic number from across the pond – for a very special lady in the audience, ‘Why do fools fall in love?’’ He winked at someone in the crowd.

Ray, who was standing near the stage, felt her heart slip a beat. Then she noticed that his glance was directed elsewhere – towards Delta who was looking straight up at Billy. It was clear he was singing to her and her alone.

Ray felt hot tears rising and started pushing her way across the dancefloor towards the door. Someone grabbed her arm and she turned – to see the Doctor, looking awkward. 'I was wondering, Ray... '

'Thank you, Doctor, I'd love to!' Ray smiled appreciatively and pulled the Doctor onto the dance floor.

Even if the Doctor had no intention of asking her to dance, he was far too gracious to admit any other possibility.

Meanwhile, at the front of the stage Billy and Delta were drowning in the pools of each other's eyes.

Chapter Thirteen

A small orange pup-tent had been erected in the lee of a nearby hill. A fire danced outside, throwing leaping shadows onto the thin canvas. Inside the tent Hawk and Weismuller were trying to get comfortable. 'Hey Hawk, go and put some more wood on the fire.'

'Why don't you, Weismuller?' came the indignant reply.

'Because you're next to the flap, Hawk,' said Weismuller wearily.

'Yeah, well take your feet out of my face first,' said Hawk peevishly, unable to argue with the logic of Weismuller's request.

The tent lurched forward as Hawk struggled to get through the flap. He emerged into the frosty night air, shivered once, and threw another long onto the fire, 'I'll get you, Weismuller,' he muttered, and crawled back inside.

Not too far away, the dance at Shangri-La was in full swing. Murray and the Doctor emerged from the hall, puffing from their exertions. The music pounded away in the background.

'Whew! It's hot in there!' said Murray fanning himself.

The Doctor nodded. 'You Navarinos have a notoriously high metabolic rate,' he said.

'Yeah. That hula-hoop competition nearly finished me off,' panted Murray, gulping in the cool air.

Just then the door of the hall flew open and Delta rushed past them to disappear into the darkness. The Doctor started after her. 'Hey! You'll

miss the last dance, Doctor!' cried Murray, but it was too late – the Doctor had already gone. Murray struggled and returned to the hall as the band launched into 'That'll be the Day'.

The Doctor was walking along the wooden 'sidewalk'

outside the cabins, trying to pierce the gloom. Listening intently, he finally heard something and stopped outside a block marked 'LINEN STORE'. He listened again, picking up a regular gentle sobbing.

The Doctor eased open the door and went inside. There, sitting on a pile of freshly-laundered sheets was Ray, dabbing her eyes. The Doctor coughed, a little embarrassed to be intruding on her privacy.

Seeing the Doctor, Ray took a deep breath and put on a brave smile. 'Hi, I was just... uh... I don't know, Doctor.

Tell me, am I being a fool? Billy didn't even offer me a ride home. He's never done that before. I feel so miserable Doctor.'

The Doctor nodded his head sagely and said, 'There's many a slap twixt cup and lap, Ray...'

She gave a wry smile. 'Somehow I always thought we'd end up together. Shows how wrong you can be. Tch!

Listen to me! What are you doing here, Doctor?'

'I was hoping to find...' he said, but cut himself off by raising a hand in warning.

They could hear the creak of the door as it was opened and someone stealthily crept through. Ray whispered urgently 'We're not supposed to be in here!' and led the Doctor behind some tall shelves, stacked with sheets, blankets and pillow cases. From their hiding place Ray and the Doctor heard the door being locked.

Standing stock still and holding their breath they could hear someone making soft mechanical clicking noises on the other side of the shelves. The Doctor cocked his head to catch the sound more clearly. He managed to stand on a large wicker basket and peep through a gap in the top shelf.

Keillor was holding a small transmitter in his hand. He extended the aerial and pushed the autosearch function before bringing it to his mouth. 'Connect me with the Bannermen leader,' he said.

There was a burst of static hiss, then a voice came through the ether. ‘Commander Gavrok – go ahead.’

Gavrok’s voice made Ray’s blood run cold. She had no idea what was going on, but she began to wish she had gone straight home.

Keillor grinned evilly. ‘I believe that you’re offering a reward for the Chimeron Queen?’

‘Affirmative – one million units. Do you have information?’ barked Gavrok.

‘I have found her. Repeat, I have found her,’ said Keillor.

‘What is your status?’ came the disembodied voice.

‘I am a soldier of fortune. Now, do you want to trade or not?’ said Keillor, confident that he had Gavrok hooked.

‘Affirmative,’ came the reply.

‘She is in a place called Shangri-La, in South Wales, Western Hemisphere, Earth. Lock onto this signal to guide you in,’ said Keillor.

‘The reward will be yours when we arrive. End transmission,’ said Gavrok.

The Doctor was aghast as he saw Keillor activate the flashing beacon signal on the transmitter – it wouldn’t take Gavrok long to reach Shangri-La.

The Doctor had heard many stories of Gavrok and his violent ways. It was no wonder that Delta was acting so strangely, with someone like Gavrok after her. The Doctor suddenly realized that the shelf he was peeing over was an inch-deep in dust. He felt his nostrils fill with the fine powder, and despite his awesome self-control, he couldn’t withhold the massive sneeze which followed. Keillor stiffened and drew his weapon, staring hard in the Doctor’s direction. Cautiously, he edged his way around the shelves towards Ray and the Doctor.

In their cabin barely 50 yards away, Delta sat at the dressing table brushing her hair. Mel sat on her bed, the silver orb beside her. Delta caught Mel’s reflection in the mirror. ‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘What for?’ asked Mel.

For lending me your dress. For making an effort to be kind.’

‘I’d help anyone in trouble, if I could,’ said Mel.

Delta felt desperately lonely. If only she could be sure of Mel. She decided to take a chance and, taking a deep breath, said, ‘Mel, there’s something you should know.’

Keillor had the Doctor and Ray backed up against the stack of linen, his gun held level with their heads. In his hand Keillor still held the flashing transmitter. ‘What a fine bonus. You’re the traveller called the Doctor. Your death will make me richer still,’ said Keillor, licking his lips like a hungry wolf.

‘If you kill for money then let the girl go. She isn’t worth anything to you,’ said the Doctor. The colour had drained from Ray’s face as she stared down the muzzle of a weapon which could annihilate her in a millisecond.

Keillor listened to what the Doctor said, then drew his lips back in an ugly leer.

‘I don’t just kill for money, it’s something I enjoy,’ he hissed, cocking his weapon. Ray stifled a scream as the Doctor stepped in front of her.

Mel was transfixed by the orb beside her. She wondered what it could be. Her curiosity was soon rewarded as the orb began to wobble and a maze of fine cracks spread across its surface.

Outside, Billy slicked back his hair and tried to revive the drooping bunch of flowers in his hand. His heart was beating hard as he prepared to knock on the door. The camp’s public address system crackled into life with the traditional song, ‘Goodnight Campers’. Billy grinned and raised his knuckles. As he did so he heard a piercing scream from inside. Billy, tossing the flowers aside, backed up and shoulder-punched the door.

He flew into the room and was brought up short by what he saw. Mel was against the wall, her hand covering her mouth in shock. Billy followed the line of her appalled gaze and his own mouth fell open. There on the bed beside the silver orb, now cracked open like an eggshell, was the ugliest creature he had ever seen. Small, wrinkled, bright green and covered in slime, the baby Chimeron opened its mouth and bawled.

Delta, her face lit by a radiant smile, advanced with open arms towards the ugly hatchling. ‘My baby. My beautiful baby,’ she cooed.

Billy sank down onto the bed, his mouth trying to say something which his brain couldn't quite formulate.

Chapter Fourteen

Hurtling across the void was the Bannermen fighter.

Gavrok's shoulders heaved as he uttered a laugh which sounded like a drain unblocking. 'That bounty hunter will be paid off sooner than he thinks. Arm the Beacon Hunter!'

For all his experience Keillor had made a fatal slip. He should have know better than to trust a Bannerman, especially Gavrok their leader, who was the epitome of all evil. Gavrok cared nothing for fair play or justice. Even men like Keillor who were despised throughout the solar systems had their own special brand of con-duct. Keillor was about to pay the ultimate price for his error.

The pilot opened the cover of the red attack module and pressed the 'FIRE' button. The ship rocked under the sudden surge of energy as a colossal stream of ions flashed along the radio path being emitted by Keillor's transmitter.

In the linen store Keillor smiled, raised his weapon and took aim. Ray clung speechlessly to the Doctor, paralysed by the prospect of imminent death.

As Keillor's fingers curled around the trigger the pulsing beacon in his other hand suddenly exploded with tremendous force. There was a brilliant flash and the linen store was bathed in a cold blue aura.

The blue was very intense at the spot where Keillor stood. It was as if he had been turned to stone, his cruel features frozen in an ugly grimace like a medieval gargoyle.

As the blue light faded, Keillor cracked apan and disintegrated in a haze of dust. The smoke slowly cleared, revealing the Doctor and Ray lying motionless on the floor. As for Keillor, there was only one sign that he had ever existed – his blue suede shoes with a thin tendril of smoke curling out of each. A strong smell of ozone filled the room.

In Delta's cabin, Mel and Billy sat mutely on the bed waiting for an explanation, while Delta cuddled the green infant in her arms. The Chimeron Queen sat like this for some time, studying the child, her features softened in an expression of tenderness. She knew that the baby she held in her arms was the only hope of survival for her race.

The burden of responsibility weighed heavily on her shoulders, but she was deter-mined to fight to the bitter end.

Eventually, she made a decision and raised her eyes.

‘Please Billy, you must promise me that you won’t tell anyone what you have seen here tonight. My life is at risk,’

she said. Billy nodded. ‘If I’m going to trust you then I think you deserve a full explanation. Close the door. What I am about to tell you is for your ears only,’ she continued, glad to have found some support at last.

Chapter Fifteen

Dawn insinuated its rosy fingers between the cabins, driving the last feathers of mist into the sky. A cock crowed in the distance.

In Burton’s office his wrinkled assistant, Vinny, sipped a glass of hot water and honey. He cleared his throat several times and did his voice exercises, which consisted of saying ‘Mi! Mi! Mi!’ very fast. As the hands on the large wall clock crawled round to seven o’clock, Vinny turned on the camp’s Public Address system.

In Delta’s cabin Billy was sitting boggle-eyed as she finished her incredible tale. ‘... and so I am the last Chimeron Queen. Our planet right now is in the grip of the invaders who slaughtered my people,’ she said.

Looking sadly at Billy she held up the sleeping child. ‘She is our last hope. Her life must be protected at all costs.’

Throughout the long night a warmth had developed between Billy and Delta, the young man beginning to feel a strong protective instinct rise within him. If anyone were to try and harm Delta they would have to deal with him first.

Mel lay on her bed, asleep. Unlike Billy, she was used to tales of intergalactic conquest and war. The peace was suddenly shattered by the sound of Vinny singing, ‘When the red, red, robin comes bob-bob-bobbin’ along’, through the camp’s PA system.

Mel stirred but didn’t wake. Delta smiled at her, saying,

‘Poor Mel’s exhausted. We’ll let her get some sleep. I feel like a walk, Billy. It may help me to think.’

Billy leapt to his feet and stretched. Back on familiar territory he felt more confident. ‘This hills around here are really beautiful. We’ll go somewhere special,’ he said.

‘I can’t walk too far with the baby...’

‘I never said anything about walking,’ said Billy with a grin.

Delta threw a shawl around the baby and she and Billy tiptoed out of the cabin. As the door closed Mel opened an eye, smiled, and snuggled down to catch up on her lost sleep.

Billy led Delta behind the old boat shed where a tarpaulin covered a huge bulky object. He whipped off the cover to reveal his gleaming motorbike and sidecar.

‘It’s a monster!’ cried Delta.

Billy puffed up with pride. ‘It’s a Vincent Black Shadow

– my pride and joy,’ he said.

He offered his arm to Delta and helped her into the sidecar, placing the baby safely in her lap. Billy pulled on a pudding-basin crash helmet and swung the kickstart.

With a window-shaking roar the mighty Vincent burst into life. Bily turned towards the gate and thundered out onto the open road.

In the linen store the Doctor and Ray were still unconscious. They looked very peaceful as the dawn light tinted the sheets a gentle shade of red. As the Vincent hurtled past, it drowned out Vinny’s song. The cacophony stirred the Doctor into consciousness and he got groggily to his feet. Shaking his head he slowly felt for broken bones. His eyes lighted on Ray and registered a look of concern. Pulling a large white hanky from his pocket he gently fanned her face while patting her hand. ‘Ray, Ray,’

he called softly so as not to frighten her. She slowly came around, groaning. The Doctor helped her to her feet. ‘Are you all right? Nothing hurt or broken?’ he asked anxiously.

Ray nodded. ‘Uh-huh... but... but what happened to that man with the radio...?’

The Doctor picked up the mangled remains of the transmitter. ‘He was

paid in kind. Look, you see how this has been exploded from the inside? Obviously the Bannermen locked onto the signal then fired a high-impulse ion beam back along the transmission track.'

Ray was nodding, still aghast. 'So they... killed him?'

she asked.

'I'm afraid so – ionized...' said the Doctor. Their eyes travelled to the blue suede shoes. Ray gingerly picked one up.

'Is this all that's left of him?' she asked,

'Yes, a poignant reminder that violence always rebounds on itself. It's ironic really. The Bannermen saved our lives, hardly the sort of action they're well noted for. It makes me somewhat apprehensive, in fact,' said the Doctor. 'Come on. We haven't a moment to lose.'

'Where are we going?' asked Ray, still stunned from their recent experience.

'We have to warn the others that an attack is imminent.

We have very little time to lose.'

Ray still hadn't fully understood what was happening but she knew enough to trust the Doctor. Throwing aside the shoe, she followed the Doctor out of the storeroom and into the chilly morning air.

They ran across the gravel square to Delta's cabin. The Doctor raised his fist to knock but saw the door hanging askew on its hinges. Fearing the worst he rushed inside.

Mel was curled up under her blankets, sleep having descended at last. The sudden inrush of cold air and running feet caused her to sit up with a start.

'Mel! Are you all right?' asked the Doctor.

'Mm. Nothing a good night's sleep wouldn't cure,' she said.

'I'm afraid you'll have to delay that,' replied the Doctor.

'Where have Billy and Delta gone?'

'They didn't tell me,' said Mel, 'Billy was going to take her to some local beauty spot, I think.'

The Doctor thought for a moment. ‘It’s important to find them as soon as we can. Meanwhile we must arrange a general evacuation of the camp. The Bannermen are on their way!’

Mel sprang out of bed. ‘I’ll go and get Murray to organize the tour party.’

‘Good, but they’ll be one short,’ said the Doctor.

‘He was ionized,’ said Ray, as matter-of-factly as she could.

The Doctor was already moving towards the door. ‘I’m going to try and find Delta and Billy. Do you know where they might be, Ray?’ the Doctor asked.

She shrugged. ‘Well, there are a couple of beauty spots in the area. We could try them.’ A wistful look descended on her face like a cloud. Glancing at the Doctor she continued, ‘And a few special places known only to Billy and me.’

‘We’ll simply have to keep looking until we find them.

But the first task is to convince Burton to evacuate the camp. Mel, you find Murray. Ray, come along with me,’

said the Doctor, already disappearing through the door.

Chapter Sixteen

The lonely cottage stood beside the reservoir. The water lay like a sheet of clear glass glistening in the early morning sun. Every now and then a fish would leave the murky depths and break surface in search of break-fast.

Behind the cottage, thick pine woods covered the flanks of the hill. They stretched as far as the eye could see. At the side of the house were half a dozen bee hives.

A grey-haired old man, Goronwy, had a veil over his head as he smoked the bees from the hives. As Goronwy worked he chatted to his precious bees. Occasionally, he would break into song.

He had been a fervent member of the local male voice choir all his life and he enjoyed no two things more than singing and tending to his bees. A noise broke his reverie and made him look up. Trundling towards him along the track was the Morris Minor. Goronwy raised

his veil and the melody, ‘Blue Moon’ reached him from the approaching car. Just as Goronwy had picked up the tune and was humming along, the music stopped dead as Weismuller cut the engine.

‘Good morning, and what a beautiful morning it is!’

Goronwy said affably.

‘Hi,’ said Weismuller, ‘we’re kinda new to the area and we were wondering if you saw anything... uh... weird fall out of the sky recently? Over the last day or so that is.’

Goronwy scratched his chin. ‘Oh dear me no! I’ve seen many things fall out of the sky, of course, but nothing which could be described as ‘weird’.’

‘What about lights? Anything like that?’ asked Hawk.

Goronwy nodded. ‘There are strange lights in the night sky all the time. Not the Aurora Borealis, mind, but pulsing lights on occasion. At other times like low shooting stars.’

‘As I said before we’re really interested in the last couple of days,’ said Weismuller.

A butterfly landed on Goronwy’s hand. ‘I can ask my bees. They know everything that happens,’ he said.

Hawk gave Weismuller a sideways look and cleared his throat. He plainly thought Goronwy was crazy. ‘Yeah, well I reckon we’ve taken up enough of your time,’ he said.

Goronwy, sensing their scepticism, continued unabashed. ‘If you stayed you’d understand a bit more, young man. Take a look at this butterfly, for instance –

arguably one of the most beautiful creatures in the whole of nature. But if you were to see a pupa it would strike you as the ugliest thing you’d ever seen. Yet without one you wouldn’t have the other.’

Weismuller nodded sagely. ‘Well, thanks anyway. We’ll hear that in mind. Maybe we can get together again some other time. But right now we really must be going.’ He started the engine and the car headed away down the track.

Goronwy glanced down at his hand – the butterfly opened its wings

and flitted away into the blue sky. Goronwy watched it go, then turned back to his hives, his lips pursed as he started whistling ‘Blue Moon’.

Chapter Seventeen

A beautiful rocky peninsula with waves crashing onto crescent-shaped beaches of fine white sand. The Vincent slowly weaved across an open meadow and came to a halt at the head of a track.

The path slowly meandered down to the beach far below. Billy hopped off the bike and took the baby while Delta climbed out of the sidecar.

‘You’re a bit of a heavyweight,’ aren’t you?’ said Billy to the strange green creature in his arms. It gurgled and emitted a shrill whistle of glee. Billy quickly handed it back to Delta.

‘The most rapid growth occurs in the nymphoid state.

She’ll double her size and weight in the next few hours,’

said Delta looking around, drinking in the peace and tranquillity of the place. ‘You know you’re right, Billy. It is beautiful here. I feel safe at last,’ she said, smiling at him.

He blushed and took her hand. ‘Can you feel how fresh the sea air is?’ asked Billy taking a deep breath. ‘It’s not very far to the beach. Do you think you will be all right to walk with the baby?’ he continued. Delta nodded and Billy led her down the winding path towards the ocean.

Back at Shangri-La Burton sat in his office, wearing a canary-yellow robe over a pair of brightly striped pyjamas.

He sat in complete silence gawping at the Doctor and his hurried explanation. Ray sat quietly beside him while the Doctor paced in agitation. At last Burton cleared his throat. ‘Let me get this right – you’re telling me that you aren’t the Happy Hearts Holiday Club from Bolton, but instead are spacemen who fear an attack from other spacemen. And because of this danger I must evacuate my entire camp,’ he said, raising an eyebrow in query.

‘An excellent summary, Mr Burton. Now, if you could start right away then we should be able to get them all to safety,’ said the Doctor.

Burton smiled and waved his hand airily. ‘Oh, well, if that’s all that’s

needed it should be easy. And can we all have space buns afterwards? Or don't they drink tea on Mars?' said Burton with a large dose of sarcasm.

'I thought that you might be a little sceptical. What would it take to convince you?' asked the Doctor, getting more agitated by the moment.

'Really! This is a waste of time, Doctor,' said Burton.

The Doctor spun around and thumped the desk. 'Unless you act quickly innocent people will die!' he cried.

Burton realized that the Doctor was serious. He decided to humour him. 'All right, Doctor. Let's see some proof.

How about showing me your spaceship, heh heh,' chuckled Burton, winking conspiratorially at Ray. Burton always liked to feel in control of things and in his experience the best way to deal with people such as the Doctor was to play them at their own game. Psychology was currently a hobby of Burton's and running a holiday camp gave him the opportunity to study all sorts of people.

'Can I come too?' asked Ray.

'Of course, but let's hurry,' snapped the Doctor, already halfway through the door. Burton and Ray trailed along behind him.

Chapter Eighteen

Murray's cabin was identical to Delta's. As a matter of fact it was identical to every other cabin in Shangri-La. Except that it contained Murray – flat on his back, snoring like a buzz-saw.

He was sleeping so heavily that he didn't hear the frantic knocking at the door. Finally Mel shoved it open.

'Murray! Wake up! Wake up!' she cried.

Nothing. Murray was sleeping the exhausted sleep of the hula-hoop-competition-special-award-for-effort-winner.

In desperation Mel grabbed the nearest thing –

Murray's big toe sticking out from under the cover - and gave it a huge yank.

‘Whass’ matter?’ grunted Murray.

‘There’s an emergency, Murray. We have to be ready to leave as soon as the bus is ready.’

Murray threw aside his bedclothes and lowered his bare feet onto the cold linoleum.

Shivering, he snatched a coat from behind the door and put it on over his polka-dot pyjamas. ‘What kind of emergency?’ he mumbled, still half asleep. There was nothing he hated more than being woken up.

‘The Bannermen warfleet,’ said Mel.

‘Oh noooo,’ wailed Murray, instantly awake, his knees knocking like castanets. There was something he hated more than being woken up - the thought of his imminent painful demise at the hands of the Bannermen.

Outside the gates of the camp the door of the TARDIS

opened and the Doctor appeared, leading Burton and Ray.

Burton was grinning in simple stupefaction. Ray, already having seen some evidence of extra-terrestrial life, was no less impressed.

‘It’s called a TARDIS – an acronym of Time And Relative Dimensions In Space,’ said the Doctor.

‘It’s hard to keep track of progress these days, muttered Burton. ‘How was it all done? I think I might write an article for *Campers Weekly*. They’re always on the lookout for interesting news items. I’d like to get one of these for next year. It could prove to be quite a draw. Head Office likes their senior staff to show initiative.’

‘First things first,’ said the Doctor interrupting Burton,

‘We have to clear the camp.’

The Doctor started marching swiftly back to camp. Ray and Burton dawdled behind, both staring back at the amazing vehicle.

In the dining hall Murray was standing on a table addressing all the assembled tourists. They were moaning and griping about having their sleep interrupted and paid very little attention to Murray’s entreaties for silence.

Murray was getting very agitated with them and tried desperately to get their attention. He shouted above the clamour. ‘We should all go back to our cabins, quickly pack and then wait at the bus until we’re ready to leave.’

‘What’s the big rush, Murray?’ asked one of the tourists.

‘You told us we would be here for a couple of days yet. And besides, it’s nice here.’

Murray exchanged a look with Mel. He had no option but to tell them the hard facts. ‘Truth is, there’s a Bannermen warfleet on the way.’ Murray barely had a chance to finish before everyone was fleeing towards the doors. ‘Nice ‘n’ easy, folks. Don’t panic!’ cried Murray, but most people had already left.

Just then the Doctor appeared with Ray and Burton.

Murray hopped off the table and headed in their direction.

‘They were difficult at first, Doctor,’ he said. ‘But once I told them the real reason they didn’t need much persuading.’

‘Good, I’m glad that’s all been taken care of. I think we’d better go and check the crystal. As soon as it’s ready, you have to leave, Murray.’

‘You won’t see me for dust, Doctor.’

‘Then what are we waiting for? Let’s go!’

The gong reverberated across the PA system. Inside his office Burton had changed into a smart suit and was hitting the small dinner gong in front of the microphone.

When he was certain that he had everyone’s attention he put the gong aside. ‘Good morning everyone. This is a matter of some urgency – could all staff assemble in my office immediately. I repeat, ALL employees, without exception, to my office. Right away please.’

Ray, Mel and Murray had gathered at the bus. They could hear Burton’s voice faintly in the distance. The Doctor emerged from the TARDIS carrying a luminous glass vessel.

Inside, a large crystal hung suspended in red liquid. ‘It’s almost regrown. Another half hour should do it. And then you must leave, Murray, regardless of whether or not I’m back,’ said the Doctor,

carefully handing Murray the glass jar.

‘Back from where?’ asked Murray.

‘I have to find Delta,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Mel, you stay and help Murray organize things. Let’s go, Ray.’ The Doctor jumped on the pillion of her scooter, Ray started her hike and they raced off.

‘Don’t worry, you can depend on me!’ Murray called to the Doctor as he disappeared in a cloud of dust.

In Burton’s office the scene was sober. The staff were all standing in silence. They had never seen Burton looking so grave before. Vinny shifted from foot to foot in agitation.

Beads of perspiration stood out on Burton’s forehead.

Mopping at them with a hanky he took a deep breath. ‘I’ve called you together at such short notice because we are facing a crisis. What I would like you all to do is go back to your cabins and pack whatever you need for one night. I have already ordered a bus to take you away in a few minutes’ time. You’ll spend the night in Llandidrod Well and return in a day or so. Any questions? Splendid!’

Burton’s tone of voice implied that he hoped there were no questions forthcoming.

Whispering excitedly to one another, Burton’s staff left the room. Everyone except Vinny that is. ‘I don’t like running away, Major. What’s up?’ he said, trying to look like Burton’s batman once again. He and Burton had served together in the army twenty years ago and they had remained together ever since.

‘It’s because we face an attack from... it’s... uh... because we are in danger from... uh... it’s top secret! Had a man here from the Ministry of Defence. Now, look sharp!’

barked Burton.

‘Are you staying, sir?’ asked Vinny. ‘Yes Vinny. They’ll have to drag me away from here,’ said Burton.

‘I’ll stay too, Major.’

‘Thanks Vinny, but you all have to go. And that’s an order!’ said Burton, looking as stern as possible.

Vinny saluted and left. Burton sank down into his chair.

He reached into the bottom drawer of his desk. There, under a pile of papers, was a bar of wholenut chocolate.

There was only one thing for Burton to do – he ate it. It was a little habit Burton had picked up years ago.

Whenever a crisis loomed or he felt under considerable stress he would experience an urgent craving for chocolate.

It was not an urge he could easily ignore. Therefore in case of emergency he would always keep a bar in his desk drawer. When he had finished eating he felt his world restored to calm; he was once again ready for anything –

except possibly an attack by murderous spacemen.

Billy had laid a towel on the sand for the baby who was by now about the size of a three-year-old. Crawling everywhere, it made strange high-pitched noises which were half musical and half insect. He watched it with undisguised fascination.

‘That noise she makes – it’s almost like singing,’ said Billy.

‘It’s partly a song and partly a defence mechanism,’ said Delta.

‘Against the Bannermen? asked Billy.

Delta made no reply. She gazed out across the water. ‘It seems a long time since I felt so calm. I feel very happy here with you. I even forgot my worries for a while.’

‘That’s what I like about this place,’ said Billy. ‘It makes you want to soar high above the horizon.’

A few miles away the Doctor was clinging limpet-like to the back of Ray’s scooter as she threaded a path through the bracken. Ray hooted wildly at loosely scattered clusters of sheep, to warn them not to stray into her path.

Eventually they arrived in a leafy dell. ‘It’s called Fern dell.

We used to play here as children. But I don’t see his bike anywhere,’ said Ray.

The Doctor peered through the tangled foliage. ‘It couldn’t be hidden

anywhere, could it?' he asked.

'Not the Vincent,' said Ray. 'It's much too big.'

'Then let's not waste any more time,' said the Doctor brusquely. Ray managed to turn the scooter around in the clearing and they were soon off across the open moorland, divots of earth flying in all directions.

Chapter Nineteen

Murray was standing beside the bus holding the glowing crystal regeneration cylinder in his hand. Furrowing his brow, he attempted to beam mental energy into the jar, thereby accelerating the growth of the silvery Quarb crystal. He wasn't having much success. Brain power was never his strong suit.

Mel trotted up from the camp, somewhat out of breath.

'Fortunately they don't have much packing to do,' she said to Murray.

'No,' he replied, 'It's well known that Navarinos travel light. I suppose it's because in our natural habitat we don't have much call for clothing.'

'How's the crystal coming?'

'I'm trying to use mind power to make it grow faster,'

said Murray, scowling into the jar. Mel decided to make herself useful. Scowling like Murray she concentrated all her energies on the crystal.

An old bus chugged up the road and stopped with a clatter before the camp. Moments later Burton marched through the gates, leading a column of staff and campers behind him. He gestured for them to get onto the bus while he strode over to Mel and Murray. 'I'm doing this with grave misgivings, but I can't risk my staff,' he said.

'Just like a captain, eh Burton,' said Murray with some sympathy. Burton nodded, 'Well, I'm still not sure what I saw in there,' he said pointing at the TARDIS, 'but I can't risk my people for it.'

'You're doing the right thing,' said Mel.

Burton crossed to the bus as the last of his staff disappeared on board. Only Vinny remained, a lonely figure on the tarmac.

‘Remember, Vinny, you’re in charge now. You’re responsible for the staff in my absence,’ said Burton encouragingly.

‘Yes sir!’ said Vinny saluting Burton and briskly boarding the bus. Burton smiled one of his superior smiles.

He was extraordinarily fond of Vinny and always knew how to get the best out of him. Vinny would sometimes behave very stubbornly if he thought that he might be missing out on the action. But on these occasions all Burton had to do was to appeal to his strong sense of duty and Vinny would immediately tow the line. Burton shut the door firmly, and waved the driver on his way. He didn’t know when, or if, he’d ever see them again.

High above them, aboard the Bannerman cruiser, the flight deck was a hive of activity. Gavrok swaggered about, barking his orders and watching with satisfaction as his men scurried to obey.

A glowing grid-map of Wales had just appeared on Gavrok’s vid screen. In the centre of the map was an orange pulsing square. ‘She is somewhere in this quadrant.

It’s a pity that we had to destroy the beacon when we killed the mercenary. We’ll have to scan the whole area until we can find some sort of advanced technology emissions,’

growled Gavrok, staring at the light patterns dancing before his face.

At the edge of a wooded copse, smoke kept drifting into Weismuller’s eyes as he attempted to cook a sausage over a dying fire. Finally, when the sausage had turned black, Weismuller withdrew it from the embers, blew on it repeatedly and took a large bite.

He quickly spat out the mouthful of charred meat, and held up the remains of the sausage – inside the burnt exterior the meat was raw. The small brown pup tent was pitched in the background, next to the Morris which was intended to act as a kind of windbreak. In a fit of temper he took the sausage from the end of the stick and flung it as hard as he could, narrowly missing Hawk who sat nearby with the valve radio in his lap and the earphones on his head. He twiddled the dial one way and then the other, his face growing more sour with each revolution.

‘You’re wasting your time, Hawk,’ said Weismuller crossly.

‘Well, it’s better than stopping every passing stranger and asking them

if they've seen our lost satellite,' snapped Hawk. 'All that gets us is a reputation for being crazy.'

'But there's no point in listening to the radio, Hawk. It's stopped transmitting – that's why we've got to look for it,'

said Weismuller.

'Then I'll listen to the Voice of America! Anything's better than your yammering!' said Hawk, turning the volume to maximum and yanking out the earphones.

The radio blared forth masking the sound of Ray's scooter, as she and the Doctor belted around the corner and pulled up with a screech.

'Excuse me,' said the Doctor. 'But have you seen a couple go by here? Fellow on a big black motorbike with a woman in a green polka dot dress?'

Hawk and Weismuller shared a look. 'No sir, we ain't seen no sign of life this morning. Ain't that right Hawk?'

said Weismuller.

'hope, not even an iddy biddy squirrel,' Hawk chuckled.

'I don't suppose you've seen a...'

Hawk got no further as Weismuller jabbed him m the ribs. 'Forget it Hawk.'

'There's one more place we can try, Doctor,' said Ray.

'Then let's go!' yelled the Doctor as she accelerated away.

Hawk looked at Weismuller, 'I thought you said we had to look for it,' he said.

'That's right I did, but that sure doesn't include asking every Tom, Dick or Harry. Don't forget, Weismuller, this is a top secret mission. We have to show a little caution –

we're just supposed to be a couple of regular guys out on a camping trip.' Weismuller nodded as he threaded another sausage onto the stick.

At Shangri-La the Navarinos had all gathered around the Nostalgia

Trips cruiser. Their bags had all been stashed in the hold and they waited only for the navipod to resume normal working. They were very impatient to be away and kept scanning the empty skies for any sign of a Bannerman spaceship. One dumpy little Navarino promised that if she were to arrived home safely she would never leave Navarro again.

Murray and Mel were peering into the jar. 'I don't know much about cyrstalline structures,' said Mel, 'But that looks about cooked.'

'I think you're right, Mel. It does look ready. Shall we chance it?' asked Murray.

Mel nodded in agreement. 'Here we go then. Carefully does it...' Murray eased his fingers into the bubbling red fluid and slowly withdrew the shimmering crystal cluster.

He eased it out of the liquid and held it aloft, a smile of satisfaction on his face. However, the wet surface was extremely slippery and Murray's happy smile dissolved into a look of horror as he felt the sleek crystal suddenly slip from his grasp.

Mel dived at it, catching it in her cupped hands moments before it hit the ground. 'Whew!' cried Murray.

'You can say that again, butterfingers! Now, will everyone please give us some air so that we can put it into the navipod,' said Mel.

The space tourists stood back allowing Murray room to bolt the crystal into place. Murray worked slowly and carefully. He was determined not to take any more chances with their only means of escape.

Chapter Twenty

Two young rabbits playfully hopped around a quiet meadow. Suddenly they stopped and their ears pricked up, then quick as a flash they disappeared into a burrow. Their play had been disturbed by the puttering sound of Ray's scooter as she and the Doctor approached. Ray stopped her bike at a barred gate and looked around helplessly. The Doctor leapt off the bike and, bending down, he ran his fingers along a faint groove in the mud. 'This is the end of the road, Doctor,' said Ray. 'I don't know where else to try.'

'These tyre marks show a heavy motorcycle and sidecar passed this way. Come on Ray! We mustn't give up now!

Their lives depend on us,' cried the Doctor as he eased open the heavy gate.

The Doctor clambered back onto the bike and they set off across the open meadow along the clifftops, avoiding numerous small boulders scattered in their path. Ray shouted against the wind, 'I hope you're all right Doctor.

I'm sorry if this is a bit like an army assault course.'

'My dear child, this is as smooth as glass. I once had a similar ride on the planet Themlon. I was TARDIS-bound for a week afterwards,' he replied. Suddenly the land dipped, and there in the hollow was the Vincent!

'They're probably down on the beach!' cried Ray as she put the scooter onto its stand.

Delta had just opened her knapsack and produced a wafer of waxy cells which she fed to her hungry baby.

'She's growing so fast now that she needs to be replenished every half an hour or so. If I can get the hatchling safely to the brood planet then I can take my case to the intergalactic tribunal. They will send an expeditionary force to get rid of Gavrok and the Bannermen.'

'I'll do whatever I can to help,' said Billy. Although he genuinely meant what he said, Billy couldn't quite imagine how he was supposed to get Delta and the hatchling safely to the brood planet. He didn't think that his Vincent was going to prove very useful. Delta glanced up to see two distant figures scrabbling down the cliff-face towards them.

'Look!' she said.

Billy followed her gaze. 'Hey, that's Ray and the Doctor.

They look like they're in a hurry.'

The Bannermen, said Delta to herself. She and Billy quickly gathered everything up and hurried along the beach to meet them.

'Thank Heavens!' gasped Ray as they finally came within shouting distance of each other.

'Why's everyone in such a lather?' demanded Billy peevishly. He felt

that he was just beginning to get to know Delta at last and he was annoyed that their peace had been disturbed so soon.

‘At last we’ve found you,’ panted the Doctor. Delta gazed steadily at the Doctor, knowing the worst.

‘Gavrok?’

‘Yes. We overheard Keillor giving the position of the camp,’ said the Doctor.

‘A space mercenary,’ Delta said looking shocked.

‘Yes. There’s a price on your head,’ he continued.

Billy indignantly drew himself up. ‘Yeah? Well where’s this mercenary? I reckon we’ve got a score to settle,’ he said.

‘He’s been ionized!’ said Ray smugly. Billy suddenly became aware of her presence.

‘Uh... hi Ray,’ he mumbled, being unsure of what to say next. Something about the way she looked at him made him feel guilty.

‘We have to get back at once,’ said the Doctor. ‘Burton has already evacuated all the other staff. Murray is fitting the crystal back into the bus and then your tour will be able to leave. But we must go now!’ he insisted, already heading back up the narrow path. He was closely followed by the others.

At Shangri-La Murray had finally managed to install the navipod, and, after checking that it was again functioning correctly, slammed the hood with a grin. He gave a thumbs-up to Mel who let out a sigh of relief.

You see, I’m not totally useless! Murray felt he had redeemed himself for nearly breaking the crystal. ‘Now everyone, get ready to board,’ he said authoritatively. The passengers assembled in a neat line while Murray produced a clipboard and pen. ‘When I call your name I want you to climb aboard – Adlon – Crovassi – Diptek – Ethnon – Frag

– Gil – Herret – Keillor – uh, where’s Keillor?’ asked Murray. Mel leant forward and whispered into Murray’s ear, explaining that all that remained of the space mercenary was a pair of scorched blue suede shoes. Murray nodded. He did not wish to know the gory details and quickly continued with the roll-call.

On the outer fringes of the galaxy Gavrok stared gleefully at the blipping light on his screen. ‘Transmitter identified. Triangulate and set course.’ He leant back into his stabilizing chair and smirked. He was relaxed in the knowledge that his mission was nearly completed.

Chapter Twenty-One

Hawk finally removed the headphones with a look of disgust. ‘Ain’t no use, Weismuller. There’s nothing out there,’ he said, gesturing up at the empty sky.

‘Well, you know I’m not the sort to say “I told you so,”

but...’ Weismuller had stopped mid sentence, his mouth hanging open. He was staring at something behind Hawk.

There, silhouetted against the trees, stood the menacing black Bannerman fighter. Hawk blinked in disbelief before whispering, ‘Hey Weismuller. D’you think that’s it?’

Weismuller turned and looked in the direction of the spaceship. He paused before answering, trying to make sense of the strange vessel. ‘Well, I don’t rightly know. I ain’t never seen a satellite before. I expected it to be smaller, somehow...’

The hatch opened and Gavrok appeared in view. He unfurled the Bannermen standard and coldly surveyed the landscape before him. Unsheathing his blaster he stepped into the field; throwing back his head he let out an ear-splitting whistle. A column of half a dozen heavily-armed Bannermen responded by marching through the hatch and lining up behind him.

‘Listen Hawk, I dunno what’s going on here, but I reckon we should get outta here fast!’ said Weismuller, backing towards the Morris.

‘Yeah, for once I think you could be right,’ Hawk agreed, stumbling over the radio in his haste to get away.

Suddenly Gavrok’s mournful horn blew across the valley. ‘HALT!’ he cried. Hawk and Weismuller froze.

Within moments they were surrounded by the Bannermen.

Weismuller was the first to speak. Putting on his most charming voice he said, ‘Hi... uh... we weren’t going anywhere.’

‘No, we thought maybe we’d just sit in the car for a while. But we’re not that fussy, I guess,’ Hawk added.

‘Where is the Chimeron Queen?’ barked Gavrok.

Hawk shrugged, ‘Beats me, pal,’ he said.

Gavrok gave a tiny nod. One of his men fired at the radio. When the smoke cleared, all that remained was a mangled piece of twisted scrap iron.

‘Hey, that’s the property of Uncle Sam!’ cried Weismuller in alarm.

Gavrok turned his icy glance on Weismuller. ‘Where is he, your Uncle Sam?’

Hawk raised a hand, saying, ‘No, you don’t understand...’ But he got no further. Gavrok gave another small nod and the tent caroomed into a massive fireball.

‘Boy, what are you so sore about?’ asked Weismuller, watching the scraps of burnt canvas fluttering away in the breeze.

Gavrok levelled his gun at the American agent.

Weismuller’s face drained of colour but Gavrok had already turned away. ‘I won’t waste good ammunition on these fools,’ he said. ‘I will lead the main party. You two remain here to protect the vessel and guard these incompetents!’ He motioned to two of his men who nodded in reply. ‘Come!’ Gavrok strode away down the valley followed by his henchmen.

‘Boy! These guys really mean business,’ whispered Weismuller.

‘Weismuller, I think I get it. The Chimeron Queen –

that must be the satellite.’

‘And if the enemy get their mitts on it we’re both sunk,’

Weismuller replied gloomily. They were both under the impression that the Bannermen were agents from some other world power. The true reality of the situation was totally beyond their comprehension. Before Hawk and Weismuller had a chance to draw any more conclusions the two Bannermen sentries advanced on the trembling Americans.

The Nostalgia Trips cruiser was ready to fly. All the Navarinos were aboard, except for Murray who was talking to Mel. He scuffed his feet in the dirt, saying, 'Well, we're all gassed up and ready to go.'

'Then you must leave at once, Murray,' said Mel.

'But the Doctor and Delta...' he said.

Mel smiled, 'Wherever you go, we can find you in the TARDIS.'

'I know, but I feel bad about leaving you here alone.

This is your last chance to hitch a ride,' Murray pleaded.

From inside the bus came the sound of Murray's name being called repeatedly. The space passengers were very nervous by this time and wanted to leave as soon as possible.

Mel glanced up the valley. She didn't relish the idea of being left alone but she had made a promise. 'No, Murray, I've made up my mind. When the Doctor and I agree on something we always stick to it, come what may. Thanks anyway,' she said.

'Okay,' said Murray, resigned to her decision. 'It's time we got this show on the road. As they say around here – see you later, alligator!'

Mel grinned and replied, 'In a while, crocodile.'

Murray climbed aboard and fired up the engines. He turned the bus to face the open road and the afterburners covered Mel in exhaust fumes.

The exhaust noise rose to a shriek as Murray revved up the power and the bus started lumbering away down the road. Murray's hand appeared through the window, waving at Mel.

'BYE!' shouted Mel, relieved that the bus was at last underway. Her smile froze in horror as the bus was engulfed in a massive orange fireball. The force of the blast threw Mel onto the ground, temporarily blinding her.

Moments later the blast debris rained down all around her.

Fifties clothing, memorabilia purchased in the camp shop and pieces of food covered the tarmac for a hundred yards in every direction. There was more food than anything else

– in fact enough to feed a bus-full of hungry Navarinos. A large chunk

of the cruiser fell only inches from Mel's head.

Although some of the letters were missing she could clearly read the words 'Nostalgia Trips'. In the centre of the debris was a patch of blackened earth, to show where there had once been a bus loaded with holiday-makers.

Mel groaned as she slowly started to recover her senses.

She became aware that something was moving through the heavy pall of smoke hanging over the scene. Straining her eyes to see, Mel started to rise, desperately hoping that someone may have survived. But she sank back to the ground when she recognized the red and black fluttering insignia of the dreaded Bannermen.

A lump rose in her throat. 'No! No!' she said as the realization dawned. She tried to rise but a large booted foot kicked her back. She was looking up into the ugly face of Gavrok. Standing behind him was a Bannerman with a smoking bazooka. He did nothing to hide the look of satisfaction on his face.

'So, one of them escaped,' Gavrok growled.

'You... you killed all those innocent people...' said Mel in a small voice, her face streaked with dirt and tears.

'Was the Chimeron Queen amongst them?' said Gavrok, putting his blaster to Mel's head.

Although terrified and furious, Mel's wits hadn't deserted her. 'Yes. Yes, she's dead. They're all dead,' said Mel.

'You wouldn't lie?' barked Gavrok. 'You saw what happened to that bus.'

'No one could have survived that,' she replied in a trembling voice.

Gavrok nodded and grinned, sniffing the heavy sulphurous fumes of the blast. 'That's right. The Chimerons are finished.' Raising his standard to the sky he shouted, 'Chumeria is ours.' Gavrok's men gathered round him cheering and whooping.

Mel felt totally wretched. It pained her to watch these vile creatures enjoying their victory so, but there was nothing she could do. She felt guilty about the Navarinos.

If Murray hadn't lingered for so long, in an attempt to talk her into leaving, they would have been safely away by now.

Gavrok turned and started walking back towards his ship. Mel's face showed her relief. But it wasn't to last long.

In the distance she could already hear the approaching throb of the Vincent. She scrambled to her feet in time to see the Vincent and Ray's scooter rush over the rim of the valley, racing towards them. Gavrok turned, his gun ready.

Delta, in the sidecar, suddenly recognized the dark figures standing near the camp gates. 'Bannermen!' she yelled. Billy swung the bike into a tight turn, nearly flipping them over. Ray also spun her scooter around, the Doctor clinging on for dear life.

'Don't let them get away!' Gavrok screamed. The Bannermen all opened fire at once. Shells exploded all around the two bikes as they raced for the safety of the valley.

Within seconds the pasture resembled a battlefield as smoke poured from burning craters. Whole trees were uprooted and had their trunks split from top to bottom by powerful energy rays. All signs of wildlife had disappeared except for flocks of terrified birds which covered the sky in a dark mass.

When they were out of sight Gavrok turned to Mel, his blaster glowing with heat. 'You lied!' he screamed at her, as he raised the blaster and took careful aim at her head.

'STOP!' someone said. Gavrok turned to see who had the effrontery to tell him what to do. Burton was furiously marching from the camp gates.

'It would be extremely foolish to kill her – keep her as a hostage,' he said to Gavrok.

Gavrok though for a moment and then nodded. He turned to his number two, saying, 'Kill any other survivors and tie these two up. They will not be used as hostages, but as bait!'

Mel had never been so pleased to see anyone in all her life. She felt like kissing Burton. 'Thanks; for one awful moment I thought I'd had it.'

'Really, don't mention it. I've had dealings with scoundrels like this

before. It's all a matter of psychology,'

said Burton putting a finger to the side of his head.

'Whatever it was I'm very grateful.' Mel took several deep breaths and felt the blood circulate freely in her veins once more. What a holiday this was turning out to be.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The two bikes slewed into a lay-by. 'Do you think Murray and the others got away, Doctor?' said Delta.

'I'm afraid not,' he replied, 'That patch of scorched earth is all that remains of them.'

No one spoke. They were very upset to think of those hapless Navarinos, now reduced to free-floating ions.

'Mel's still there, Doctor,' said Ray. 'I saw her.'

The Doctor snapped out of his reverie. 'My immediate objectives are to free Mel and get Delta somewhere safe,' he said.

'I go along with that Doctor,' said Billy, who was ready to do battle.

Delta suddenly stood up, gently stroking the silver pits under her ears. 'Do you hear something?' asked Billy.

'Those pits are actually high frequency antennae,'

explained the Doctor. 'What do you detect, Delta?'

She screwed up her face in concentration. 'It's not clear but it's coming from over there,' she said, pointing to the east.

'There's nothing there except old Goronwy's place...'

said Billy.

'Does he keep bees?' asked the Doctor.

Billy looked startled, 'Yeah, that's right. How did you know?'

'His bees are telling us to come,' said Delta.

'Oh,' said Billy not quite convinced.

‘Billy, which is the quickest route to this Goronwy fellow’s place?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Straight over the moors. I know a short cut.’

‘Good! We’ll follow you then,’ urged the Doctor. The Convoy started off across the difficult terrain towards Goronwy’s cottage.

Goronwy had a veil over his face and was unsuccessfully trying to eat a piece of honeycomb through it when the Vincent and the scooter arrived.

‘Hi Goronwy, we were wondering…’ said Billy.

‘Of course. I am Goronwy’ he said, holding out his hand to the others. ‘You know, I feel very popular at the moment. You’re the second lot of visitors I’ve had today,’

he added. The others looked at one another suspiciously.

‘Two Americans. At least I think they were Americans.

Not very friendly though! But then I suppose they were in a bit of a rush,’ he continued.

‘I thought for one dreadful minute…’ Ray was cut short by the Doctor.

‘If the Bannermen had been here first I doubt if this gentleman would have remained in such good spirits.’

Delta’s baby became agitated and started trying to grab the honeycomb from Goronwy. ‘She likes a bit of honey does she?’ he said, his face wrinkling into a smile.

‘Could these people stay with you for a few hours?’

asked the Doctor.

‘Of course. But let’s go inside and have some tea,’ said Goronwy.

‘I’m going to have to leave at once. Could you lend me a white pillow case and a broom handle?’ asked the Doctor.

Goronwy accepted without question many strange things and so was not in the least curious about this odd request.

‘Splendid,’ said the Doctor. ‘And could I borrow your bike, Billy?’

‘OK,’ said Billy, looking doubtful, ‘but please be careful, Doctor.’

‘I’ll treat it like the TARDIS,’ said the Doctor.

Somehow this didn’t have the ring of reassurance which Billy was looking for.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Mel and Burton had been tied back-to-back outside the main block of chalets. Mel couldn’t help fidgeting. The knots were biting into her wrists and stopping the flow of blood. ‘I’m afraid, young lady, that the more you wriggle the tighter it will get,’ advised Burton. ‘Try to relax. The swelling should go down that way and you’ll feel much more comfortable. It’s an old army trick,’ he explained.

‘OK, I’ll have a go,’ agreed Mel unhappily.

‘Do you think the Doctor will come?’ asked Burton.

‘Yes! He’d never leave us here like this,’ said Mel as if Burton’s question was a silly one.

‘That’s what I thought. I wonder what his strategy will be.’

‘Don’t worry, the Doctor always thinks of something.’

‘You’ve been in situations like this before?’ Burton appeared shocked.

‘Oh yes, loads of times. We have a great knack of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.’

‘I see,’ said Burton, unsure of what to say next, and thinking what a curious pair they were.

Gavrok sat in a rocking chair, a power blaster resting across his knees, waiting for the arrival of the Doctor and Delta. Like Mel, he was sure the Doctor would come. It was only a matter of time. He had heard many things about the Doctor but never that he was a coward.

The

Bannermen slouched around, priming their weapons. All heads lifted as the sound of the big twin echoed down the valley.

Then the Vincent appeared, driven by the Doctor. Stuck into the sidecar was a white flag of truce, or on closer examination, Goronwy’s

old bed linen. Gavrok smirked and raised the blaster. When the Doctor was within about 20 feet Gavrok fired. The flagstaff sheared and the white flag fell in a flaming heap. When the Doctor cut the engine he was apoplectic with rage.

'How dare you? A white flag is an accepted signal of truce throughout the civilized universe!' he cried.

'Who will stop me? You with your puny flags and appeals to fair play and justice? I spit on justice!' said Gavrok.

'Your charm is matched only by your compassion,'

snapped the Doctor.

'Why shouldn't I kill you right now?' barked Gavrok.

'Because you're in enough trouble already, Gavrok.

Release these people and I will testify that you showed some mercy.'

'Testify? You'll never get me to trial,' said Gavrok.

'Delta has sworn a statement alleging invasion and genocide of the Chimerons. You will be called to account, Gavrok.'

'Bring me Delta and I will give you life,' hissed Gavrok.

'Life? What do you know about life? You deal in death, Gavrok. Lies, treachery and murder are your currency.

You see everything through a veil of smoke and blood. You promise life, Gavrok, but in the end it will be life which defeats you!' shouted the Doctor, shaking with fury.

Gavrok sprang to his feet. 'You have said enough! I have traversed time and space to find the Chimeron Queen and I will not be defeated!'

The Doctor stepped back a pace but threw out his chest defiantly. 'Very well. I came here under a white flag and will leave under the same white flag. And woe betide any man who breaches its integrity. Now step aside Gavrok –

it's over. You're finished and we're leaving!'

The Doctor took a white hankie from his pocket and waved it aloft. He

pushed through the gawping Bannermen until he reached Mel and Burton. He started pulling at the ropes that bound them.

‘Steady on Doctor,’ said Burton.

‘Yes I know the old adage, "More haste less speed", but I don’t think this is quite the time or place to put it to the test,’ the Doctor replied. Finally they were free. As they turned towards the motorcycle they heard the ominous click of half a dozen phasers. They were looking down the barrels of a small arsenal. Standing with his blaster aimed straight at the Doctor’s chest was Gavrok.

‘Actually, I think I may have gone too far,’ muttered the Doctor to Mel and Burton, who were thinking the same thing. There was only one way to go. The Doctor took the lead and started walking towards the waiting Vincent.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Bannermen guns followed their every move, waiting only for the signal from Gavrok to blast the Doctor into sub-atomic particles. The Doctor looked neither right nor left but strode resolutely towards the Vincent. His movements and facial expression showed no sign of fear.

He might as well have been walking to the corner shop for a newspaper. Mel and Burton followed on behind, fearing that each step would he their last.

Burton held the Doctor in high esteem for his brave stance. He hadn’t quite decided whether it was a sophisticated ploy or a spontaneous act of valour, but whatever the reason his action merited admiration. As he marched along behind the Doctor, Burton could feel the adrenalin pumping through his body. In fact, he was positively enjoying himself – it was almost like the old days in the army. But then, considering how traumatic this must be for his companions, he felt a ringe of guilt and tried to push the thought from his mind. After all, Mel and the Doctor were only civilians and had no military training. What a weekend this was turning out to be!

Burton made a mental note of his feelings and observations. If they managed to get away safely he felt sure that this would prove to be a rich source of material for his work on the human condition.

Mel wished she had never got up this morning. This was the second time in one day that she had been threatened with death. She was becoming quite a veteran.

At least she couldn't complain that her holiday was dull –

it was more action-packed than most people dare hope for.

It felt like she was participating in a bizarre dream, and without being able to control herself she began to laugh.

'I can't see the cause for hilarity, Mel,' whispered the Doctor. 'I might even go so far as to say that laughing at Bannermen, under these particular circumstances, might be described as suicidal.' Hearing the Doctor's familiar voice brought Mel to her senses.

'Sorry Doctor. I don't know what got into me,' she said guiltily. 'But I think that it was nerves rather than humour.'

After what seemed an eternity they finally reached the Vincent. The Doctor firmly gripped the throttle on the bike and swung the kickstarter. The bike roared into life and Mel and Burton climbed on. The Doctor engaged first gear and slowly let out the clutch. The anticipated volley of fire never came and the bike moved slowly out of range towards the rim of the valley. Then, in a cloud of dust and with screeching tyres it took off like a bat out of hell.

Gavrok, who had followed their every move through his gunsight, smiled and raised his weapon into the air. He savoured nothing more than the smell of victory, and, carefully choosing his moment, he fired an incandescent flare into the sky. He stood motionless, watching it float earthwards like a small comet.

At the wooded copse the two Bannermen guards, Arrex and Callon, had Hawk and Weismuller sitting back-to-back. Arrex and Callon looked up sharply as the signal flare arced across the heavens. They instantly jumped to obey the command. Arrex headed back towards their fighter, while Callon covered Hawk and Weismuller.

'What's happening now, Weismuller?' asked Hawk.

'Why ask me? I'm as confused as you are. Anyway, whatever it is, it can't be worse than sitting around with these two jokers,' muttered Weismuller, nodding in the direction of Callon.

Arrex emerged from the ship carrying a flat metallic bar about three feet long. At each end was an adjustable metal collar, studded on the inside with cruel spikes. Hawk shot Weismuller a sour glance. 'I gotta feeling we might be in for a long spell of sitting around,' Hawk said.

Callon opened one collar while Arrex fiddled with the other one. Finally, they clamped the collars around the necks of the unfortunate Americans, effectively immobilizing them. Arrex locked the collars in plce with a small hexagonal device. They then stood back and studied their victims. Arrex laughed, 'Come, Callon, they will be here when we get back.'

Then Arrex and Callon headed towards a bend in the road, leaving their prisoners shackled by the neck and unlikely to stray anywhere.

After careful manoeuvring, cursing, cries of pain and many shouted instructions, Hawk and Weismuller managed to get to their kees but no further. However much they tried they found it impossible to stand.

'Even Houdini wouldn't he able to find his way out of this contraption,' Weismuller grunted.

'Yeah, well I reckon Houdini would have been too darn clever to get himself in a mess like this in the first place,'

Hawk replied angrily.

'Okay,' said Weismuller, 'let's try sitting again... one...

two... three!' Weismuller sat down abruptly, dragging Hawk behind him, They had to move in total unison, otherwise the spikes in the collar would dig into their necks. Hawk was trying to turn his head to glare at Weismuller but the slightest movement made him wince.

They barely heard the scooter stop some distance away, but were instantly alert the moment Ray emerged from the cover of the trees. 'I thought they'd never go,' she whispered. 'You look like something out of a medieval torture chamber.'

'Thanks a lot, kid. You sure know how to make a guy feel better,' responded Weismuller.

'Sorry! Can you move?'

'Just so long as I don't have to take my neck along...'

said Hawk trying to speak without moving his jaw. 'We'd really appreciate it if you could get us out of this,' he pleaded.

Ray examined the locks on the shackles and tried pulling them apart,

but it was futile. ‘It’s no use, ma’am.

They had a special spanner, kinda like a dinky Allen key,’

said Weismuller.

Ray trotted back to her scooter and returned a moment later with her jangling toolbag. ‘Are these "dinky" enough?’

she asked, producing a full set of Allen keys.

‘It’s looking good,’ said Hawk, appearing cheerful for the first time that day.

The sweat dripped from Weismuller’s forehead as Ray tried one key after another. At that moment, Arrex and Callon were nowhere to be seen but they could return at any time. Weismuller felt sure that they would consider this to be an act of provocation and deal with them accordingly. Unfortunately, he had a good imagination and it made him squirm in anticipation of unpleasant things to come. Finally, one key worked and the shackles sprang open. Hawk and Weismuller got to their feet, rubbing their necks.

‘That’s torn it,’ said Hawk. ‘I think my back’s gone again. I’m still paying physio bills from three years ago,’ he moaned.

‘Quit griping, Hawk. Be grateful you’re not still on your knees with that iron necklace round your gullet,’ snapped Weismuller.

‘Get in your car and follow me!’ hissed Ray urgently, already heading for where her scooter was hidden.

Hawk and Weismuller exchanged a puzzled glance but there was no time to argue. They would rather take their chances with Ray than wait around for the two Bannermen thugs to return. They jumped into the Morris and churned the started. ‘Say,’ said Weismuller, ‘who was that?’

‘Beats me,’ muttered Hawk as they puttered after her.

As the Vincent thundered away from the camp, Mel and Burton whooped with joy. ‘We did it, Doctor. Free!’ cried Mel. The Doctor didn’t look quite so jubilant.

‘There’s more to this than meets the eye, Mel,’ he muttered, changing gear as he approached a tight bend in the road.

Mel was too relieved to allow the Doctor to take the wind out of her sails. She turned and smiled broadly at Burton, clinging precariously to the pillion saddle. ‘The Doctor is always suspicious. It’s part of his nature,’ she giggled.

‘I think probably that the Doctor’s past experiences have taught him it’s always better to keep an open mind,’

said Burton.

‘Absolutely, Mr Burton. Remember Mel, things may look simple, but they are always at least twice as complicated as they first appear,’ replied the Doctor.

Arrex parted the gorse bush as he heard the hike approaching. He and Callon shared a glance and pushed small silver-flighted tracker darts into their weapons. The bike was slowing down for the bend as they stepped into the centre of the road, weapons raised.

The Doctor caught sight of the Bannermen. He realized that there wasn’t enough space to squeeze between them and the hedgerows which flanked the road, so he did the next best thing – he accelerated straight at them. As the Bannermen dived out of the way they fired: one of their small darts embedded itself in the sidecar and the other flew off at a tangent into the woods.

‘Did they get you, Doctor?’ gasped Mel.

‘No. I don’t think they were trying to kill us,’ said the Doctor, glancing in the mirror in time to see Arrex and Callon trying to free themselves from the snagging gorse bushes.

‘Well, that certainly makes a change,’ said Mel, not convinced.

Burton, his face frozen in a grimace, clung on for dear life.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Goronwy was showing Billy and Delta around his hives.

He and Billy were both wearing veils but Delta seemed at home with the insects and walked bare-headed among them, holding her daughter’s hand. The child was now about the size of a six-year-old, and already her skin tone and hair colour were starting to resemble her mother’s.

Goronwy led them to a large white hive right in the middle of the others.

‘This is the queen’s hive,’ he said grandly.

‘What’s that white stuff?’ asked Billy, peering at some gooey white fluid in the waxy cells.

‘Royal jelly – it’s super-food made by the bees. It has the ability to change an ordinary worker bee larva into a queen,’ said Goronwy.

Billy was suddenly more interested. ‘That’s all there is to it? A better diet?’ he said.

‘Never underestimate the power of nature, Billy. Come, I want to show you something.’

Goronwy lifted his veil and walked to the tall barn behind his house. Billy and Delta followed, with her young daughter trailing behind, chewing on a piece of honeycomb.

Goronwy unlocked the door and threw it open. Billy and Delta could just see the glint of something inside.

Goronwy led them in. There, on a trestle table, stood hundreds of jars of honey.

The barn was stacked from floor to ceiling with boxes.

On the side of each carton was a fat bee. The rest of the barn was filled with all the normal paraphernalia of farming – coils of rope, wire, ladders, spades and forks.

Hanging from the ceiling was a feed chute which could be raised and lowered by rope.

‘Look at this – Wales’ finest! And all created by those wonderful tiny insects,’ said Goronwy, proudly gesturing to the mountain of honey.

‘How long did it take for them to make all this?’ asked Billy, slightly overcome by the scale of the production.

Goronwy scratched his chin. ‘I don’t really know –

we’ve been working together for so long that I’ve completely lost track of time. But I remember this one especially well,’ he said, blowing the dust off a jar and holding it up to the light. ‘It’s 1932, a hot summer

with abundant cherry blossom – a classic honey!' he said with pride.

'Incredible!' said Billy in awe.

'Take it boyo,' said Goronwy, offering him the jar.

'Accept it with our compliments.'

'Thanks. It will be just the thing for my toast,' said Billy. Mundane activities such as breakfast seemed a distant memory.

Delta's child, sitting on a box, suddenly started making an extraordinary grizzling sound. 'She's due to change –

the singing time is near,' said Delta. She took a tube of greenish liquid from her knapsack and gave it to the child who sucked greedily at it.

Billy watching in fascination. 'What's the singing time?'

he asked.

Delta looked up as she helped the child to squeeze the final drops from the tuble. 'It's the next stage in her growth. This food will boost her energy for the metamorphosis.'

'Will she grow up into a princess?' asked Billy, still barely believing his eyes.

Delta nodded. 'Yes. Her hair and eyes are already changing to my colouring. She's been fed on this substance since birth.'

Billy's eyes narrowed in concentration as a thought flashed through his mind. Surely it was too fanciful, too strange, too implausible... but just maybe...

A strange vibrant sound cut the air like a knife, causing Billy to wince and involuntarily put his hands up to his ears. 'Sometimes it sounds really pretty, other times it's just horrible,' he said, glaring at the small green creature.

'The sound oscillates – one frequency is an attack warning, the other is musical. Soon she will be able to control it,' said Delta, taking the child in her arms.

The sound of approaching vehicles caused them to look up. Ray arrived on her scooter closely followed by Hawk and Weismuller in the Morris.

Goronwy rushed outside to meet them, pleased and excited to receive more visitors. He was glad that he had stocked up with ample supplies of tea and cakes. He had always thought that it was very important to extend one's hospitality to both friends and strangers alike. The Americans were slightly dazed to be back at the farm, and took some coaxing to get out of the car.

Delta took the infant by the hand and wandered outside, leaving Billy to collect her knapsack. He picked it up and then paused, hesitating for a minute before reaching into the sack and producing a tube of the green high-protein larva food. Putting it into his pocket he stepped outside to join the others.

Some distance away Arrex held the open spiked collar in his hand, his anger matched only by his fear of Gavrok.

There was nothing else for it but to contact his chief. He clicked on his radio transmitter. 'Tracker darts in place, sir,' he said confidently, hoping that the good news would outweigh the bad. 'And the... uh... prisoners have escaped, sir,' he said, glancing nervously at Callon for support.

Callon was staring at the ground. He had witnessed the wrath of Gavrok many times before and wasn't too hopeful about his response to their blunder.

There was a long silent pause. Finally, Gavrok spoke,

'Pursue at once. I will follow the signal.' The radio whined, indicating that the discussion was over. Arrex and Callon shared a sigh of relief and set off down the road at a fast jog, not quite knowing where they were going or what they hoped to find. But anything was better than waiting there for Gavrok to arrive.

'We should have put their craft out of action,' said Callon. Arrex laughed. 'That piece of primitive technology was only fit for humanoids. We can move faster of foot.

They can't have got far away. We'll find them and when we do...'

'They won't try and escape again in a hurry,' said Callon completing the sentence.

They both felt more confident that they would be able to put matters right. Above all else, they had to avoid irritating Gavrok any further.

Meanwhile, the Doctor kicked the Vincent into neutral as they approached a crossroads. Burton pointed the way and they tore off down the road, the silver tracker dart still stuck firmly in the nose of the sidecar.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Gavrok was standing near the gates of Shangri-La, staring at a small fiat screen in his hand. He was following the radar blip being emitted by the tracker dart. 'Return to the fighter!' he snarled at his men.

They slung their weapons over their shoulders and started towards their craft. Gavrock trailed behind, still staring at his blip screen, a look of intense irritation on his face. He was about to hand it to his adjutant when he suddenly noticed an orange glow impinging onto the screen from the direction of the TARDIS. Gavrok stopped and slowly turned his screen towards the Doctor's craft. As he approached the TARDIS the whole surface lit up with a tangerine tinge, indicating a vessel of considerable power.

'So, Doctor,' smirked Gavrok to himself, 'we have found your ship. It will be your downfall.'

Gavrok threw hack his head and let out a shrill whistle which stopped the Bannermen in their tracks. Gesturing to the nearest Bannerman, Gavrok harked, 'Sonic cone! At once!' The nervous soldier ran towards Gavrok, at the same time reaching into his pouch and producing a small blue pyramid-shaped object. He carefully handed the cone to Gavrok who growled at him. The Bannerman immediately locked his fingers to form a stirrup.

Gavrok stood in the man's hands and reached up onto the top of the TARDIS where he steadied the sonic cone in place. He then removed the safety screw, giving him five seconds to get clear. He hopped down and he and the Bannermen moved well clear of the TARDIS. Gavrok took the priming box from his belt and hit the red button. An answering red light started flashing on the sonic cone. The weapon was now fully armed and ready to go.

It worked by emitting a cone of ultrasonic sound which radiated within a specific area around it. If anything were to break the sonic cone by attempting to enter its parameters it would trigger a massive explosion. The TARDIS had been booby-trapped in such a way that anyone entering the craft would be blown into a million pieces.

Gavrok picked up a stick and tossed it in a slow arc towards the

invisible force field. As the twig entered the field of power it atomized in a brilliant flash of light.

Gavrok gave a rattling laugh and headed for the fighter.

Blades of sweet young grass and stalks of clover were crushed under the heavy wheels of the Vincent. The Doctor had turned off the main road and was now bouncing his way across an open meadow. The only other inhabitants of the field were a couple of sheep and a goat tethered in one corner. Mel's face revealed her perplexity.

'Why are we stopping here, Doctor!'

'In order to lengthen the odds against us. May I borrow your ribbon, Mel?' Mel handed her pink ribbon to the Doctor who leaned down and killed the engine as they reached the goat. The goat gave them a disdainful look through its yellow eyes and then carried on chomping the grass.

Hawk and Weismuller were leaning against the Morris.

Hawk had a look of dull disbelief on his face. Billy, Delta, Ray and Goronwy stood in silence as Weismuller outlined their scuffle with the Bannermen in minute detail, going over and over the same points umpteen times. Puffing himself up before his captive audience he gestured away over the brow of the hill towards his attackers.

'Sure we tried to fight our way out, but there was just too many of them,' said Weismuller waving his arms about.

'You should see what's left of the radio and tent. Noth'n', but a hole in the ground. Their leader was about seven feet tall, a realy ugly-looking guy. But I gave it to him straight.

"Look!" I said, "we're working for the President of the United States of America. You mess with us and you mess with *him*." We could tell that shook him up a bit. So anyway there we were surrounded by these jokers, staring death in the face.'

'OK, Weismuller I think they get the picture,' said Hawk, a little embarrassed by Weismuller's make-believe show of bravado. 'All I know is that they're not Americans!' said Hawk triumphantly. 'No Yankee would carry on like that!' he said, glaring at the others, daring them to contradict him.

Ray was getting exasperated. 'But we've already explained who they

are!' she cried.

'Yeah, Lex. Kinda like hitmen from Mars,' Weismuller said.

Hawk rounded on him with a look of sheer disbelief on his face. 'You too, Weismuller? Well, let me tell you something – whoever they are, I plan to get even.'

'Listen!' said Goronwy. Everyone fell silent. They could hear nothing at first, then it came faintly across the moors

– the thump of the big Vincent. Soon it came into sight.

Burton and Mel, although still whey-faced, were looking excited as the bike slewed to a stop before the others.

'You got them out, Doctor!' cried Ray.

'Well done Doctor,' said Delta, who knew that it was no simple task to outwit the Bannermen.

'Yeah, well done Doc,' Billy joined in as he circled his bike checking for signs of damage.

'Thank you, but we're not home and dry yet,' replied the Doctor, his usual realistic self. 'We only have a couple of minutes. Ray said that you might have some honey in store, Goronwy?'

'Only about ten thousand jars, Doctor,' Goronwy said with some satisfaction.

'Excellent!' said the Doctor, springing out of the saddle.

'Ray and Billy come with me and Goronwy. Mel, could you please get everyone ready to move out. I have just one last thing to do.'

Goronwy led the Doctor into the barn, followed by Ray and Billy.

'Hey! Would someone mind telling me what is really going on around here,' said Hawk.

'Oh! Don't start that again,' Mel cried. 'We've told you a trillion times already. Come on. Let's just do as the Doctor says.'

'I don't want any more of your fairy stories. I just want you to level with me,' Hawk whined.

‘Shut up Hawk. Remember one of our functions is to observe and take note. We’re trained to draw our own conclusions,’ Weismuller whispered to Hawk confidently.

He had almost begun to believe his version of their struggle with the Bannermen and was feeling quite heroic.

Mel started to usher the others into the cottage, their progress punctuated by sounds of hammering and sawing coming from the barn.

On the Bannermen fighter Gavrok stood before his vid screen. The blip had centred and was giving a constant regular pulse, Their quarry had obviously arrived at their destination.

‘Signal has stabilized. Prepare to blast off,’ said Gavrok, confident that the end of his quest was near. The pilot proceeded to flip his switches and the machine’s powerful motors whined into action, The craft shuddered as the thrusters surged, lifting it sky-wards.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Arrex and Callon carefully parted the screen of pine branches to peer at the small cottage and barn. From this distance it appeared deserted, although there were a number of vehicles parked outside. Arrex put a magnascope to his eye and nodded to Callon. Through a window he could see Delta moving about inside the cottage. Callon snapped several lengths of silver tubing together to form a high-powered sniper’s beam-weapon.

Arrex screwed the magnascope onto the barrel of the weapon and carefully took aim, waiting only for Delta to walk into shot. In the branches above them a squirrel took flight and fled into a hole.

‘Never mind those two worthless idiots. If we can dispose of the Chimeron Queen our leader will have good reason to be pleased with us,’ said Callon.

Arrex nodded in agreement. ‘He may even reward us.’

With that thought in mind they turned to the job in hand.

Inside the cottage they were all unaware of the impending danger. Delta’s daughter was sitting solemnly in her chair, staring into space. Delta was looking through the contents of her knapsack with a worried frown – a tube of the special food was missing. She hoped

that the remaining food would be sufficient to see the little girl through her changes.

Burton, ever a calm presence in a crisis, entered with a steaming tea-tray followed by Mel. Hawk and Weismuller were locked in earnest conversation in a dark corner.

Hawk played his trump card. 'It's our patriotic duty to call Washington, Weismuller,' he said.

'Yeah, well you cau do it Hawk. I ain't licked yet,' said Weismuller defiantly. 'And furthermore, I consider it to be my patriotic duty to see this thing through to the end. And that's exactly what I intend to do.' Hawk was about to respond but he never got a chance to open his mouth.

At that precise moment the little girl sprang to her feet and uttered a piercing insect-like trilling. She started to grow, and, shedding her greenish skin, she emerged a moment later about the size of a thirteen-year-old. She had perfectly clear skin with eyes and hair just like her mother's. Her 'singing' went up an octave, causing everyone to clap their hands over their ears.

Delta, who moments before had been standing in front of the window, dived out of sight. She reacted not an instant too soon – the window exploded under the impact of a high-density stream of particles and a great chunk of plaster was kicked out of the opposite wall by the force of the blast.

Crouching under the window, Delta pulled her weapon from her tunic and adopted a two handed firing stance.

Suddenly she leapt up and stood in the window, taking aim at the snipers hiding in the distant trees. She snapped off a couple of quick shots then ducked out of sight again, waiting for the answering fusillade of shots from the woods.

Arrex was lying on the pine needles, his purplish blood seeping into the brown earth. Callon still had his hands clamped over his ears, the Chimeron noise having the effect of paralysing him with pain. He glanced at the cottage and forced his frozen legs into action. Leaving Arrex behind, he staggered away through the pine forest.

Branches cracked all around him as Delta fired another volley from the cottage.

The Chimeron war cry and fusillade of shots brought the Doctor, Billy, Ray and Goronwy rushing from the barn. The Doctor saw Delta standing in the window, her smoking phaser still in her hand. She slowly put her weapon away and was joined by her daughter. The Doctor smiled when he saw the change in the young girl. 'She saved Delta's life with her warning cry. She's entering the singing time,' he said.

Billy glanced anxiously towards the woods. 'Do you think there are any more of them?' he asked.

'Certainly,' snapped the Doctor, 'which is why we should get back to the TARDIS immediately. They could arrive at any time.' The Doctor raised his voice. 'Get ready to leave at once!' he cried. The cottage door opened and Mel appeared, leading the shaken inhabitants.

On board the Bannerman fighter Gavrok snapped a fresh clip into his weapon. The ship's instruments indicated that they were right above the blipping tracer.

'Prepare to land,' he hissed. The pilot locked the craft into

'DESCEND' mode.

A strange convoy had assembled outside Goronwy's cottage. Ray was at the head of the column with the Doctor riding pillion. Behind them was the Vincent with Billy, Delta and her daughter. The final vehicle in the convoy was the Morris, containing Hawk, Weismuller, Burton, Goronwy and Mel. Hawk and Weismuller sat in the front with the others squashed in the back.

'I see why they call this car a Morris Minor,' said Weismuller. 'Next time we'll go for something a bit bigger

– something more America!'

The Doctor suddenly remembered something. 'One last touch,' he muttered. Leaping down from the scooter he took a scarf from around Delta's neck and stuck it under the closed door of the barn.

He left a scrap of the brightly coloured material projecting from the door and then strode over to the open window of the cottage. He reached in through the window and turned on the radio at full blast.

The Doctor hopped back onto the scooter and gave the signal. 'Let's move out!' he shouted, and the strange convoy started off to the roar

of exhausts.

The Bannerman fighter had landed in the corner of the field. The hatch flew open and Gavrok and six of his armed cohorts sprang out. Gavrok stared angrily around, searching for his quarry. ‘What’s this?’ he growled. A terrified Bannerman handed him the portable blip screen.

An unmoving dot appeared on the screen. It equated with a spotted goat which was quietly chewing on a length of twine in the corner of the field. Gavrok strode over to the goat. There, around its neck, was the silver tracker dart, tied in place with a neat pink ribbon. He snatched it off and stared at the dart in his hand.

Gavrok’s face slowly grew purple with rage. He spun around looking for someone to blame. Not wanting to catch Gavrok’s eye his men stared intently at imaginary objects on the ground.

Callon, scratched and bleeding from his flight through the bushes, was gasping as he emerged from the woods. He had run non-stop for several miles. He found himself at the edge of a field with a dry stone wall surrounding it. He glanced up and could hardly believe his good fortune –

there in the far corner of the field was his fighter! And some distance away he saw his beloved leader, standing beside a goat. He couldn’t help noticing the terrible look on Gavrok’s face and hoped that one of his colleagues was in more trouble than him. ‘Gavrok! Gavrok!’ cried the exhausted Callon, clambering over the fence.

Gavrok looked up on hearing his name. What he saw only succeeded in making him more angry. Callon had lost his banners, his weapons and his dignity. He was no longer fit to be called a Bannerman. Gavrok raised his blaster and aimed at the hapless soldier.

Callon felt the blood drain from his face and knew that he would have to act quickly to save his life. ‘I found their hideout, sir!’ he blurted. Gavrok looked with great distaste at the shabby soldier, undecided as to whether or not he should shoot. Finally, he lowered his weapon and Callon exhaled with relief.

Callon stumbled the last few yards to his leader before he dropped to his knees with exhaustion. Gavrok and the other Bannermen gathered around him while, panting heavily, he told them the full story. When he had finished Gavrok grabbed him by the collar and dragged him to his feet.

‘I have decided not to kill you this time, worm. Not because I am feeling merciful, you understand. That would be the mark of a weak leader. But because we may need every blaster that’s available. Even if it does belong to a miserable coward.’ Pushing Callon away Gavrok ordered,

‘Tidy yourself up.’ Callon made a frantic effort to comply with his leader’s wishes.

The strange convoy led by Ray and the Doctor threaded its way across the moors, heading towards Shangri-La and the final confrontation. More than one stomach was churning with nervous tension at the thought of what lay ahead.

Gavrok and his men, under direction from Callon, had also arrived at what they believed would be the final confrontation. They stood in the woods, surrounding Goronwy’s farm, surveying the cottage. Rock ‘n’ roll drifted to them on the breeze. Gavrok stood on the dead Arrex’s hand without seeming to notice. ‘Stand by to storm the dwelling,’ he ordered.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The convoy hurtled through the gates at Shangri-La and stopped beside the TARDIS. The Doctor was as usual in control, but a certain urgency conveyed itself. He turned to Burton, saying, ‘We will draw the Bannermen away when we leave. You should be perfectly safe since they are primarily interested in Delta. I’ll prepare the TARDIS for immediate take-off.’

The Doctor produced his key and started advancing towards the TARDIS. He suddenly stopped and squatted down, picking up a fragment of something lying charred in the dust. ‘Keep back! It’s been booby-trapped. Mel, please get everyone inside the camp.’

Hawk, who by now was completely fed up with all the strange notions strode forward and pointed at the TARDIS. ‘Booby-trapped? Who does he think he’s kidding. Ain’t nothin’ but a callbox,’ he said confidently.

‘Look up there,’ said the Doctor, pointing at the blue pyramid on top of the TARDIS. ‘Next to the light, a small beam weapon. It emits a cone of sensitivity all around the TARDIS. Anything entering the cone detonates an explosion.’

‘Sure it does,’ said Hawk laughing to himself.

‘Can’t you somehow get around it?’ asked Ray, ignoring Hawk’s remark.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Unfortunately not. It’s a very sophisticated system.’

Hawk elbowed his way forwards. ‘Yeah, well I reckon this is all so much eyewash. I’m gonna call the chief...’

Before anyone could stop him Hawk stomped towards the TARDIS. The Doctor dived at him, managing to catch his ankle as Hawk’s hand entered the sonic cone – BOOM!

The blast threw Hawk onto his back, his face and hand blackened. He scrabbled to his feet, blowing on his burned hand, his eyes wildly spinning in his head.

‘I tried to warn you,’ said the Doctor sternly, ‘If you’d stepped right into the beam you would have been atomized!’

‘I... er...’ muttered Hawk. ‘This is all too much.’

‘C’mon back to camp, Lex,’ said Weismuller, gently trying to lead him back to safety.

‘But... but I was zapped by a callbox!’ Hawk shook his head a few times then turned to Weismuller with eyes as wide as saucers. ‘They’re all from outer space, Weismuller.’

‘Yeah, I know. It sure looks that way. Come on buddy, let’s get you fixed up,’ said Weismuller, leading the stunned Hawk away to the camp. Every few seconds the limping Hawk would turn his head back to look at the TARDIS.

‘Mr Burton, would you please take everyone back to the safety of the camp while I try and defuse this booby-trap. If it explodes with full force it’ll take us all with it,’ said the Doctor.

Burton nodded and started to shepherd everyone to safety. He was completely at ease now that he was back on familiar territory. He looked on the Doctor as the Commanding Officer and was prepared to carry out his instructions without hesitation. He knew how important it was to maintain discipline. If only that Hawk fellow had followed orders he wouldn’t be in the state he was in now.

Although he thought perhaps it was a little unkind, he considered

Hawk's unfortunate accident to be a useful lesson and one that he hoped the others had learned from.

The Doctor stood staring at the TARDIS for a moment, a maze of complex options whirling through his brain.

Finally, he decided on the simplest. He picked up a long stick and started to cautiously approach his spaceship.

At Goronwy's place Gavrok dropped his hand. 'Open fire!'

he cried and a withering burst of sustained fire ripped out of the trees towards the cottage. Window panes smashed and the walls were pock-marked by explosions as the ear-splitting cacophony continued. At last, Gavrok raised his hand as a signal for the men to stop firing.

The silence was eerie. Gavrok was the first to emerge from the trees, his weapons raised. He and his men fanned out as they carefully approached the cottage. Gavrok felt certain that no one could have survived the firestorm but his instincts told him to he wary.

He and his lieutenant flanked the front door. Gavrok poured another volley of fire through the door then kicked it open. He and his henchman rolled inside, firing wildly, hoping to eliminate any opposition before they had a chance to fire back.

The cottage seemed empty. Gavrok led his men from room to room, finding nothing. His face grew darker with each disappointment until he reached the rearmost room in the house. 'Blue Moon' was playing on the radio.

Gavrok put his finger to his lips signalling silence then crashed through the door, firing. The only victim was the old wooden radio with its fretwork grille, which was blasted into smithereens by the furious Gavrok. He whirled on the terrified Callon, standing quaking behind him.

'Where are they, scum?' demanded the leader of the Bannerman warfleet. "They... they were here, sir,' sputtered Callon, fearing that unless he found some trace of the Chimeron Queen, and found it fast, his life would terminate swiftly and painfully. 'Maybe... maybe they're outside, sir,' he gasped. Gavrok glared at him and turned on his heels.

Once outside Gavrok scanned the skies, thinking that they may have escaped vertically, but then something caught his eye. Projecting from under the door of the barn was a scrap of brightly-coloured material.

Gavrok smirked and tiptoed up to the locked door. He blasted the heavy brass padlock with a single shot and rushed inside, followed by his men.

Another anti-climax! The barn was empty. Gavrok was about to leave when he heard a sound. A faint rumbling which grew swiftly in intensity until it was like the galloping of a multitide of horses. Gavrok and his men all looked up at the same moment in time to see a wooden feed chute swinging towards them. And tumbling down the chute was the source of the noise – about ten thousand jars of Goronwy's finest honey. Gavrok opened his mouth to shout but was too late. An instant later the bottles hit their target and smashed, coating them all in gallons of viscous honey, so thick that they could barely move.

Gavrok and his men staggered from the barn in slow motion, trying desperately to see and breathe through the glutinous liquid. When they had managed to wipe the sticky mass from their faces, they proceeded with the task of trying to pick shards of glass from their skins and clothes. Gavrok roared in frustration and cursed the Doctor to the heavens.

However, there was worse to come. As Gavrok and his men slowly made their difficult journey towards the water's edge they became aware of a distant droning, getting louder each second. Gavrok's face twisted up towards the new sound and froze in horror. The very sky seemed to darken as a monstrous buzzing filled the valley.

A vast swarm of bees converged on the honey-covered Bannermen.

The Bannermen, who until now had seemed as incapable of movement as flies in amber, were suddenly galvanized into action by the bee attack. They flayed their arms in the air, beating at the attacking bees in an attempt to protect their heads and faces, and fled, led by Gavrok, straight into the waters of the reservoir. Their plunge into the icy depths worked for a brief moment, but each time they surfaced for air the Bannermen were attacked with concentrated ferocity. Gavrok stood up in the water and fired his blaster into the savage swarm but to no avail.

Within seconds he had been forced to duck under the protective waters of the reservoir once again. While in the air above the lake, the bees were grouping for a fresh assault.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

At Shangri-La the dining hall had been converted into a sanatorium. The whole affair was somewhat makeshift, consisting of Vinney's Red Cross box and a number of sheets which Weismuller was tearing into strips. Hawk sat motionless, still deeply shocked by his recent experience.

Even though his brain was dulled from the blast he was making a concerted effort to analyse the day's events. His head and hand had been bandaged very amateurishly – the strips of sheet wound around his head were already falling down over his ears. Hawk looked a pathetic site. Delta was helping Weismuller prepare the room as a sick bay in the event of a major Bannermen attack.

Although Delta busied herself with her sick bay chores she knew that there was a strong possibility that it would never be used. Tears welled in her eyes when she thought of her beautiful daughter's life being in mortal danger. She had never hated anyone in her life before, always considering it to be a destructive emotion, however, at this moment in time, Gavrok was the prime recipient of her feeling of loathing.

Just then Burton bustled in, wearing plus fours and his favourite duck-stalking hat. A shotgun was crooked under his arm, and although he looked slightly comical there was nothing amusing about his expression.

'Has anyone seen Billy?' he asked impatiently.

'He's just checking the fire equipment. I'll fetch him,'

said Delta and hurried into a small store room. Rows of red-painted fire buckets stood filled with white beach sand.

Billy stood by a length of fire hose and was putting something into his mouth when he heard Delta's quick footsteps approaching. Whatever it was, he hid it behind his back and turned to face her with a guilty smile. Delta immediately sensed something was wrong. 'What are you hiding, Billy?' she demanded.

Billy tried to think of an excuse but realized that it was hopeless. He produced the empty tube of high-protein larva food from behind his back. The colour drained from Delta's face. 'Billy! You haven't been eating it, have you?'

'I had to, Delta. I'm not a Chimeron, but if I'm to come with you then I have to become one...' he explained miserably.

‘But it’s never been tried before! It might kill you,’ said Delta, feeling a wave of helplessness sweep over her.

‘It’ll be all right, I think. Look at my hair – and my eyes

– they’re already turning,’ said Billy, looking at his reflection in the stainless steel side of a fire extinguisher.

He tried to sound optimistic, but still felt a certain dread at how the untried chemical might affect a human being.

Delta stepped closer to Billy, checking his eyes. It was true, small green flecks had started to appear around his dark pupils.

Delta felt her heart beating faster as she and Billy stepped closer to each other, seeking comfort in each other’s eyes. Their lips were about to touch when a cough from the door brough them instantly back to reality.

Burton stood there looking faintly embarrassed. ‘Sorry to interrupt, Billy, but I need a hand in the office,’ he said, somewhat more gruffly than was strictly necessary.

‘Sure thing, Mr Burton,’ said Billy, smiling bravely at Delta before following Burton towards his office. Delta looked again at the empty protein tube in her hand and her face grew grave – anything could happen to Billy but this wasn’t the time to think about it. A Bannermen attack could come at any moment.

She was, however, strangely moved by Billy’s actions.

‘He must really love me,’ Delta said out loud, then lapsed into silence. After all, she thought, no rational person would endanger their life without good reason... If they managed to survive all this chaos there would be much to do. Chumeria would never again be the same in her lifetime, but with a good man by her side she could certainly put her beloved planet on the road to recovery.

She felt a warm glow in the pit of her stomach and smiled to herself. How ironic, she thought – at last she had found true love, but she might never live to enjoy it.

Outside the camp, the Doctor was on his hands and knees, drawing a circle in the dirt around the TARDIS.

When he was finished he gingerly poked a stick across the line; it

immediately exploded.

The Doctor sighed and got to his feet, dusting himself down. This was going to be a lot more difficult than he had originally thought. Ray appeared at his elbow. ‘What are you doing, Doctor?’ she asked.

‘I’m marking out exactly where the sonic cone meets the ground,’ he said by way of an explanation. Ray looked dumbfounded. ‘Why?’

‘Because the beam comes from above it and casts a small

"shadow" directly around the base of the TARDIS. If we can tunnel under the cone and emerge in the shadow area then I can disarm it. Is there a spade back at the camp?’ he asked, peering with ferocious intensity at the sonic cone atop the TARDIS.

‘Uh... Doctor...’ said Ray, a tremor in her voice.

The Doctor started to brush aside her imagined objections, ‘I know it’s time-consuming but it’s our only choice... ‘ he muttered.

‘Uh... Doctor...’ said Ray again. This time a sense of urgency conveyed itself to theDoctor and he looked at her face. She was looking at something some distance away.

The Doctor followed the line of her eyes and sighed.

‘Sooner than I thought,’ he said in a resigned tone.

The Bannermen fighter had just landed at the far side of the camp and the hatch was already swinging open. ‘Plan B!’ cried the Doctor, grabbing Ray’s hand and running for the safety of the camp as fast as they could.

Inside the dining hall Mel had set up a human chain, ferrying buckets from the fire equipment room to the centre of the hall. Although Hawk was part of the chain he was still in something of a daze and would occasionally tip his bucket onto the floor, turn it end up and sit down, lost in thought. He was in just such a position when the door flew open and the Doctor burst in crying, ‘They’re here!

Delta, you and your daughter come with me. Everyone else remain in here until it’s safe to come out. Did you remember the beeswax, Goronwy?’

Goronwy dug in the pockets of his overall and produced a couple of

yellow wax tablets, one of which he passed to the Doctor.

‘Thanks. Where are Burton and Billy?’ he asked.

‘They’re in Mr Burton’s office,’ said Mel.

The Doctor, Delta and the girl all ran from the dining hall. Mel immediately started barricading the doors with up-ended tables. Weismuller and Goronwy were doing their best but they really could have used some help from Hawk, who was still sitting on his bucket and staring into space.

‘Hawk! Do you think perhaps you could make an effort for once. You only suffered a few minor burns,’ said Weismuller irritably. Hawk completely ignored him. ‘I’m gonna put this down in my report, Hawk. And I might not even want to partner you, next time out.’ Hawk was like a marble bust.

Chapter Thirty

Inside Burton’s office things had taken on a distinctly militaristic appearance. Burton took his ancient ceremonial sword off the wall and carefully drew it out of its sheath.

Billy had expected to see a dull and rusty blade, but was impressed by the gleaming, razor-edged weapon with which Burton was energetically slashing the air. He finally handed it to Billy, saying ‘I haven’t used it in over 40 years but it’ll still put the wind up a Bannerman!’

‘I’ll guard the dining hall, Mr Burton,’ said Billy, feeling a rush of courage as the blade whistled through the air.

Burton seemed to have been transported back to another era, sniffing the air, trying to get the scent of battle.

‘Through shot and shell, eh Billy. We’ll teach these blighters a lesson...’

The door opened and the Doctor entered, leading Delta and her daughter. The Doctor surveyed the preparations with some satisfaction. ‘Excellent effort, Mr Burton. Billy, could you please fetch a ladder.’

‘Right away, Doctor,’ said Billy, sheathing his sword and scuttling out of the door.

Billy smiled at Delta feeling quite important now that he was fully armed. ‘Don’t worry Delta – those Bannermen will be sorry they ever left... er... wherever it was they came from.’ Delta smiled at Billy encouragingly.

The Doctor turned to Delta. ‘Now, are you sure that you know what you have to do?’

‘Yes, Doctor,’ she replied.

‘Then it’s only Mr Burton who needs to be briefed.

Now, if you could just turn on your Public Address system..

Burton clicked on the heavy amplifier and stood the microphone on his desk. Everything was ready...

Inside the Bannermen ship the pilot had just unlocked the heavy arms arsenal. As the soldiers leapt through the door they were issued with a brace of weapons.

The Bannermen all looked a sorry sight after the bee attack, with faces puffy, eyes closing, and lumps and stings covering every inch of exposed flesh. Gavrok was the worst stung and consequently in the worst mood. His unstoppable rage had transformed itself into a deadly blood lust. As his men streamed past he gave them a final word of warning. ‘Once inside you will kill everyone except the young princess. I will take care of her personally.’

Gavrok jumped out of the hatch and strode off towards the camp.

Billy was dragging the powerful speaker box from his room while the Doctor leant a ladder against the wall of Burton’s office. The Doctor ascended the ladder with Billy clambering up behind him, hauling the speaker box.

Together they managed to get the heavy object onto the apex of the roof. In the distance they could see the sinister black uniforms of the approaching Bannermen. Wires dangled from the speaker box into Burton’s office.

Billy watched nervously as the Bannermen came closer.

‘Now?’

‘Not yet...’ said the Doctor, keenly watching the approaching danger.

‘What a charming bunch they are. It looks rather like they may have been in recent combat with a swarm of bees,’ he chuckled. Billy was too tense to see the joke and kept his eyes firmly on the Bannermen.

Gavrok stopped and sniffed the air like some kind of jungle animal. He could sense danger but couldn’t see where it was coming from. Directly in his path was the TARDIS. Gavrok unclipped a fragmentation grenade from his belt and pulled the pin with his teeth, his red eyes scanning the horizon like lazer beams.

Up on the roof Billy was squirming with tension. ‘Now?’

‘A moment’s impatience would mean our certain annihilation,’ snapped the Doctor. The strain was beginning to show. The Doctor knew that they would only have one chance against Gavrok, and if that chance were squandered then the ferocious Bannermen would triumph, with disastrous results for all.

Gavrok’s regular scanning motion picked something up.

‘Snipers come forwards,’ he hissed. Two Bannermen armed with long slim silver assassin weapons, complete with high powered magnascopes, came abreast of their leader.

However, Gavrok wanted to choose his moment – nearly as exquisite as the pleasure of victory was the look in the victim’s eyes when they knew for certain they had been defeated. And in this case Gavrok was adamant that they would all be made to pay for the bee attack. Yes, he would choose his moment with care.

Gavrok unhooked the spiral horn from his belt...

Up on the roof Billy could barely contain his nerves.

‘I think they’ve spotted us, Billy,’ said the Doctor. ‘Stand by...’ The Doctor pulled a lump of beeswax from his pocket and gave half of it to Billy who quickly stuffed it into his ears. Mel and the others were standing on a table, peering through an airbrick at the Bannermen massing outside.

Gavrok was within spitting distance of the TARDIS

when he noticed the circle drawn in the dirt around the base of the craft. He stopped and raised the horn to his lips.

A low mournful bellow rang out through the camp, sending icy shivers

amongst his intended victims.

The snipers came alongside and raised their weapons, taking careful aim at the Doctor and Billy perched on the rooftop.

'NOW!' cried the Doctor. Billy frantically tugged on the wire which led from his speaker box. Inside the office Delta felt the signal and propelled her daughter towards the microphone. She opened her mouth and started

'singing' at full volume into the microphone.

The Chimeron warcry echoed across the valley, amplified a thousand times by the PA system and thrown out at a huge wattage from Billy's roof-mounted speaker box.

It was as if the Bannermen had walked into a concrete wall. They stopped dead, hands clamped over their ears.

Their weapons fell to the ground with a clatter as they dropped to their knees. The 'singing' hit the precise frequency which was necessary to immobilize them. As the keening sound reverberated around the valley the Bannermen looked a spent force.

All except for Gavrok who tossed his head like a wounded bull and refused to go down. He let out a bellow of rage and pain as he staggered around, his hands locked over his ears, trying to keep the immobilizing noise out of his head. But Billy's system was standing up well and throwing out a high number of decibels. Gavrok's eyes were screwed up in pain as he tottered from side to side, each step carrying him closer and closer to the ring circumscribing the TARDIS. His feet shuffled nearer to the circle until the young girl's voice rose in a final crescendo which sent Gavrok spinning straight into the beam of the sonic cone.

BOOM!

Gavrok pulsed with purple light for an instant before being reduced to his component molecules by the powerful weapon of his own devising. His men, lying weakly in the dust nearby, could only watch horrified as their beloved leader vanished in a puff.

The Doctor was running from the camp, followed by Billy brandishing his sword. Weismuller and Ray trailed along behind carrying a sports bag crammed with skipping ropes. The Bannermen were still in a groggy state.

The Doctor opened the sports bag and took out several skipping ropes. ‘Secure them with these,’ he said, handing them to Weismuller.

‘Be my pleasure, Doctor. When I was an eagle scout knots were my favourite thing.’ Weismuller began to truss up the Bannermen, pulling the knots as tightly as he could.

It was his revenge for that awful contraption he and Hawk were forced to wear. Maybe he had been a little hard on Hawk. After all, there was the possibility that his head wound was more severe than he had originally thought. As soon as he had finished his task he would check Hawk out.

As he worked he gave the Bannermen a running commentary: ‘This is my speciality. A running noose combined with a dog shank.’

Finally, the Doctor signalled to Delta and the ‘singing’

stopped, much to everyone’s relief. The Bannermen were lying tightly trussed on the ground. The Doctor checked that no damage had occurred to the TARDIS and then turned, walking back towards the camp.

Chapter Thirty-One

Delta was hugging her daughter. Burton was unplugging the PA when the Doctor appeared in the window. ‘It’s all over,’ he said with relief. The others stared blankly at him.

‘I said it’s safe to come out now!’ said the Doctor a bit louder, thinking that the ‘singing’ may have left them temporarily deaf.

Just then the door burst open and Billy entered, beaming triumphantly. He carefully unbuckled the ceremonial sword and returned it to Burton. ‘We did it!’ he cried. The others in the office stared blankly at him. Billy pointed at his ears and suddenly they smiled, removing the beeswax plugs from their ears. The Doctor leaned in through the window, grinning. ‘Let’s go and run a flight check on your new ship, Delta,’ he said.

‘You all go ahead,’ said Billy. ‘I have to go and pack...’ A frown crossed the Doctor’s face.

‘I’il catch up with you later. I must have a word with Billy,’ said the Doctor, disappearing from sight. He managed to intercept Billy en route to his cabin.

The Bannermen were all tied in a neat bundle outside the TARDIS. Weismuller was walking along the line of captives, shaking his head. ‘You’re as sorry a bunch of Bannermen as I’ve ever seen!’ he said smugly.

Just then Hawk wandered up, looking puzzled.

Weismuller saw him and called him over saying, ‘Hawk, come here partner. You wanted to get even and now we are.

About as even as we can get, I reckon. They don’t look much do they, all trussed up like Thanksgiving turkeys,’

he said, trying to coax a reaction from his partner.

Delta and her daughter emerged hand-in-hand from the camp. She stopped beside the TARDIS and addressed everyone present. ‘Thank you for your help and courage.

All of you,’ she said.

‘Are Billy and the Doctor all right?’ asked Ray.

‘Yes,’ said Delta, ‘Billy’s just changing...’

Ray bit her lip and looked sad. Mel put a comforting arm about her. Ray knew that she was about to lose Billy for ever. All her hopes and plans would come to nothing.

She also knew that Billy had no choice but to follow the dictates of his heart, and being a basically decent person, Ray bore neither him nor Delta any ill will. She had to be practical. She would just have to organize her life differently, that’s all. The hardest thing of all to bear was the probability that she would never again be able to see Billy.

She didn’t know where Chumeria was, but she was wise enough to know that it was too far to travel for a weekend.

She was happy to have made such good friends with Mel and the Doctor and thought that they were very special people. Although it wouldn’t be long before they too were taking off in their funny little spaceship, to strange planets she had never even heard of. Ray sniffed a couple of times and a single tear rolled down her cheek. Ah well, Wales wasn’t that bad...

Billy was indeed changing. His eyes and hair had become recognizably

Chimeron. The Doctor stole a sideways glance at him as they entered his cabin. The room was identical to the others, except that it had been decorated by the addition of posters of large motor-bikes.

They covered every door and all available wall space.

Billy's portable record player had 'Gamblin' Man' on the turntable. His suitcase was open on the bed as he packed his few remaining possessions.

The Doctor was pacing restlessly. Finally, he stopped and faced Billy. 'It's true that they need a male or the race will die out. But I haven't seen many examples of species-crossing. There could be the most dreadful mutation.'

Billy opened another tube of the high-protein food and squeezed it into his mouth. 'But it's our only chance, Doctor,' he mumbled through the gooey slime.

'That's exactly why it shouldn't be squandered on reckless experimentation!' said the Doctor with mounting exasperation. Exasperation because he knew that whatever he said to Billy would have no effect in changing his mind.

Still, the Doctor had a responsibility to try and warn him of any pitfalls.

'Well, I reckon it's too late now,' said Billy with a cheerful grin. He removed the seven-inch single from the turntable and put it into his suitcase. He closed the record player and reached under the bed for his guitar case.

The Doctor finally sat down on the bed and gave a long sigh. 'I can't condone this foolishness – but then love has never been noted for its rationality,' he said. Billy gave him a wide grin. The Doctor noticed how the sunlight bounced off his skin, which now had a silvery-green hue.

They left Billy's cabin and went to the boatshed. The Doctor waited impatiently while Billy fiddled around inside before finally appearing with a box full of mechanical bits. The Doctor hopped into the sidecar and Billy kicked the Vincent into life. 'Did you manage to get it all?' shouted the Doctor above the roar of the engine.

'Uh-huh,' nodded Billy, 'Cables, chain, plugs, points, condenser, rings, brake shoes and a spare clutch.'

‘That should do it,’ muttered the Doctor as Billy slipped the bike into gear. ‘I can’t think of anyone who’d appreciate it more,’ said Billy as they headed for the gate.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Inside the fighter the groggy Bannermen had been bound back-to-back and were stacked like a miserable cord of firewood, waiting to be transported through space. Delta, Hawk and Weismuller were standing over them.

Weismuller nodded towards the Bannermen. ‘That should hold them until they get back to Mars or wherever it is they’re going,’ he said.

‘Considerably further than that,’ replied Delta.

Hawk seemed to have partially recovered from his stupor and looked like he was rather enjoying the spectacle. Every now and then he would nudge or prod a Bannerman. ‘That will teach you to mess with us earthlings. Earthlings! What am I saying?’ he chuckled to himself.

Weismuller hoped Hawk was beginning to get back to his old self. He was feeling slightly apprehensive about what he was going to put in his report. He thought that there was a strong possibility that his explanation of the recent events would be met with some scepticism.

The young girl came running in, pointing towards the camp.

Billy and the Doctor appeared on the Vincent and stopped beside the Bannermen craft. Billy had become pure Chimeron. Delta stepped out to meet them, her arm still around her daughter. ‘Everything ship-shape?’ said Billy grinning.

Delta nodded and turned towards the others. ‘I don’t know how I can ever thank you for what you’ve done. You have saved our planet and our race. You will always be welcomed there as heroes,’ she said.

Billy put an arm around her. ‘Goodbye everyone.’ He turned to Ray who was gulping back a tear. ‘I’ll always think of you here at Shangri-La, Ray,’ he said, smiling at her.

Ray swallowed a lump. ‘G’bye Billy. I won’t forget you either...’ she stammered as the hatch started to close.

‘Hey! I nearly forgot,’ yelled Billy, ‘The Vincent’s yours now. Remember to feather the clutch,’ were his final words.

Ray's face lit up as she looked at the gleaming Vincent standing beside her. She climbed aboard, awed by its magnificence. She turned to thank Billy but the hatch had already closed. The ship gave a brief judder then took off.

'Thanks Billy. Take care of yourself,' she whispered and blew a kiss into the clear blue sky.

The Doctor circled the bike studying it closely. 'What are you thinking Doctor?' asked Ray.

'I was just speculating what this vehicle would be like with a sophisticated suspension and braking system.'

'Are you kidding? This is the best there is.' Ray swung her weight onto the kickstart lever and the huge engine coughed into life. 'BYE!' she cried and roared away.

The Doctor turned and started walking towards the TARDIS.

'STOP!' said Mel.

'It's quite safe now,' said the Doctor, 'Gavrok absorbed such a huge amount of energy that the device used up all of its power.'

Hawk, who had now developed a nervous twitch, was blinking furiously. 'Now I can call Washington,' he said decisively. But then he stopped and his jaw hung slack.

'But I don't know what to say...' he trailed off. Weismuller put a comforting arm around him.

'No one has to call them old buddy. We can take it easy,'

he said.

'That sounds like a good idea. How does a holiday sound to you, Mel?' said the Doctor.

'A month at least,' she replied with a grin.

'Good. Please accept our thanks for everything, Mr Burton,' said the Doctor.

'Thank you, Doctor. I haven't seen such a shindig since I went buffalo hunting in Africa. Treacherous brutes, buffalo...' said Burton, trailing off into reminiscence.

Goronwy appeared and, reaching into his pocket, he produced a jar of fine golden honey. ‘1928 hibiscus blossom,’ he said, handing the jar to the Doctor. The Doctor’s eyes lit up.

‘Ah! The nectar of honey or the honey of nectar. You’re more than a collector, Goronwy – you’re a man of taste!’

‘Thank you Doctor. And now I must get back to my little friends. They will be expecting me and we have a lot of work to do,’ said the old man, winking at the Doctor. He turned towards Hawk and Weismuller. ‘Ah, my American friends. If you are ever again in the vicinity looking for strange objects that fall from the sky, drop in for tea. I enjoyed our little chat before.’

‘Why thank you sir. That’s very fine of you to offer,’

replied Weismuller with a pleased look on his face.

Just then a tour bus arrived at the gates of the camp. Its roof-mounted loudspeaker was playing ‘Singin’ the Blues’

at high volume.

‘Good Heavens! I completely forgot – the Skegness Glee Club! And I have no staff. I really must dash – goodbye,’

said Burton, furiously pumping the Doctor and Mel’s hands before trotting off to welcome the new intake of campers.

The only people now left were Mel and the Doctor, Hawk and Weismuller. Something caught the Doctor’s eye.

There, hanging from the top of the metal gatepost, was the American satellite, surrounded by other debris from the Navarino bus. Large and round and slightly dented from its interstellar impact but basically still intact.

The Doctor pointed at it, saying, ‘I believe that satellite belongs to you, gentlemen.’ Weismuller slowly turned and gawped at the gutting orb. His face cracked into a smile which became a whoop of glee. He clapped Hawk between his skinny shoulder blades so hard that he almost fell over.

‘We did it, Hawk! We actually did it!’ he cried with delight.

Everything had turned out all right in the end. Now that they had the

satellite there would be no need to mention Bannermen and spaceships, and they could go home practically as heroes. Hawk would probably receive a medal for being wounded on active duty. At that moment Weismuller couldn't be happier. He turned back to the TARDIS. 'Thanks Doc...' he started to say but his mouth fell open. The blue police callbox had vanished as if it had never existed. Weismuller, no longer surprised at anything, scanned the heavens for any sign of the disappearing spacecraft. All he could see was a clear blue sky with the occasional bird breaking through its smooth surface. He turned slowly back to where the satellite hung on the gatepost. It was still there. 'C'mon old buddy,' he said to Hawk, 'we're going home...'

Epilogue

The Bannermen craft flashed through deep space, accelerating strongly all the while. Inside the craft Billy was sitting at the flight controls, trying to learn the basics of interstellar navigation from Delta. 'It's a bit more difficult than the Vincent,' he said.

'Once you've got the hang of it then I'm sure you'll be an excellent pilot. You seen to have a natural affinity for mechanical things,' said Delta.

Billy stared at the instrument screen. 'Uh... how long till we get to the brood planet?' he asked.

'It won't be long now,' she said, checking the star charts.

In the hold the Bannermen were sitting up, trying to eat the food which the young princess was offering them on the end of a long fork. They had first thought of trying to overpower her and recapture the ship, but two things had argued against that approach – first was that without Gavrok to lead them, not to say bark at, bully and cajole them, the Bannermen had felt the zest go out of soldiering.

As a matter of fact, they had decided that if they were ever free again, they would set up a weaving collective, making rugs which could be sold throughout the galaxy. The second thing which ensured their meek compliance was the princess herself, who had given a low call just to let them know that at the slightest sign of trouble she would open her mouth and paralyse them with pain.

A small yellow dot appeared on the screen. Billy raised a silvery green eyebrow in query. Delta nodded. 'There it is.

It'll take over for the landing,' she said, taking the controls from Billy. He marvelled as he watched her hands swiftly working the instruments, bringing the craft down to a speed which would not tear it apart as it entered the atmospheric envelope of the brood planet.

With a hiss the craft settled onto the ground. The hatch opened and Billy stood staring open-mouthed at what lay before him – the entire surface of the planet, as far as the eye could see, was covered with hexagonal cells, each big enough to take a man. Or more to the point, a Chimeron.

Delta stood beside him, smiling broadly.

'We've done it, Billy. In a couple of years I will have reproduced the nucleus of an entire community here, and then we can return to Chumeria and repopulate it completely.' She gazed into his eyes and said, 'Thank you.,

'What about the Bannermen?' asked Billy.

'Do you think you could take them to the galactic prison star to await trial?' Delta asked.

'Sure,' said Billy, 'Be a piece of cake.'

Delta and her daughter disembarked. Billy kissed them both, saying that he would be back soon. He closed the hatch behind him, then dialled a set of digits into the flight programmer and eased back on the joy-stick. The craft lifted up and within seconds was streaking through the void.

When Billy arrived with his wretched captives at the galactic palace of justice, there was an armed guard to greet him. Word of the attack on Chumeria and the subsequent assault on Shangri-La had spread through-out the civilized galaxy. The atomization of Gavrok was seen as a major contribution to peace. The Supreme Law Lord himself came out and congratulated Billy on his achievement as the Bannermen were led away. They were to remain in a dungeon until such time as they came to trial. A heavy sentence was expected, but before Billy left he made a special appeal to the Supreme Law Lord – that the Bannermen be given thread and looms and be allowed to start their rehabilitation at once.

The entire court population turned out to see Billy off, and when he pushed the joystick forward he felt exactly as he did when doing a wheelspin on the Vincent.

However, when he touched down on the brood planet he felt as he had never felt before. Delta came rushing to meet him, flinging her arms around his neck with a cry of delight. Billy, a billion miles from Earth, had come home.

Meanwhile down on the little blue planet, Weisrnuller drove the Morris Minor into the forecourt of Daffyd Owen's Car Hire Ltd. The satellite lay on the back seat, covered by Hawk's jacket. As for Hawk he seemed to be fairly well recovered, except when he saw the silver sphere in the back, then he would start muttering to himself and shaking his head.

'C'mon, Hawk,' said Weismuller, emerging from the office. 'Mr Owen has offered to drive us to the station.' The office door opened and Mr Owen emerged. He got into the car and started the engine.

'All right boyo?' he asked of Hawk. Hawk nodded vigorously, making sure that his jacket didn't slip off the satellite.

'And where will you boys be going now?' enquired Owens amiably as the car puttered towards the centre of Betwys.

'Home!' said Weismuller from the back seat, not bothering to mask the grin of satisfaction on his face.

Owen pulled up at the train station and the Americans got out, trying to hide the satellite under various garments.

'Give us a shout next time you're in town,' cried Owen as he pulled away.

Hawk turned to Weismuller, a perplexed look on his face. 'Tell me something, Weismuller,' he said. 'When we get back to the US of A, I don't think we should tell anyone what *really* happened here – agreed?' Hawk stuck out his hand.

'Agreed,' said Weismuller.

With a shrill whistle the 10:45 express to London pulled up at the platform. Hawk and Weismuller clambered aboard, and the train steamed away.

Goronwy, on returning to his home, was distressed to find the carnage done by the Bannermen. However, he was philosophical about it. The first thing he did was to make himself a strong cup of tea which he took inside with a tray of scones and honey. He pushed the scones to

one side of the plate and was pleased when a moment later a couple of bees appeared and started eating them. He gazed up into the clear sky and shook his head, lost in thought. A butterfly landed on the back of his hand. Goronwy smiled..

Ray, upset to have lost Billy, was delighted to have acquired the motorbike. Not simply any motorbike, but the best bike in the world. Although she couldn't travel to distant galaxies like the Doctor and the others, she could travel to distant lands. The following day she packed her possessions into a suitcase and threw them into the sidecar.

She fired up the big bike and turned south. Remembering to feather the clutch she slipped away. Within two hours she was at the ferry port, waiting to board a boat to take her and the Vincent across the Europe. Then maybe to Africa, or the Far East, or to anywhere else in the whole wide world.

And in outer space the Doctor was kneeling as he tried to reach something under the instrument binnacle. 'I've almost got it, Mel,' he said, straining his fingers to grasp the object lurking in the darkness.

'Can you see it clearly, Doctor?' she asked.

'Hrnm? I think so. It looks like it's at least a ten-credit piece,' he said, fingers stretched to the utmost to grasp the object.

'That's it!' He cried, emerging triumphantly. He blew some dust off the object in his fingers - it wasn't a credit at all but was instead a striped mint humbug, covered in fluff.

Mel's face fell, then she started to laugh, 'I think we need to spring clean, Doctor,' she gasped through her laughter.

'Hmm,' muttered the Doctor, picking the fluff off the humbug and popping it into his mouth. Mel meanwhile had produced a scratched , black vinyl disc and a crude portable record player. The Doctor looked at her and grimaced.

Spectators in that part of space, had there been any, would have been treated to a strange sight - a blue police phone box hurtling through the heavens, vibrating slightly to the sound of 'Rock Around the Clock'. And above it all, Mel's high-pitched laughter.

Document Outline

- Front cover
- Rear cover
- Title page
- Copyright
- Contents
- Prologue
- Chapter One
- Chapter Two
- Chapter Three
- Chapter Four
- Chapter Five
- Chapter Six
- Chapter Seven
- Chapter Eight
- Chapter Nine
- Chapter Ten
- Chapter Eleven
- Chapter Twelve
- Chapter Thirteen
- Chapter Fourteen
- Chapter Fifteen
- Chapter Sixteen
- Chapter Seventeen
- Chapter Eighteen
- Chapter Nineteen
- Chapter Twenty
- Chapter Twenty-One
- Chapter Twenty-Two
- Chapter Twenty-Three
- Chapter Twenty-Four
- Chapter Twenty-Five
- Chapter Twenty-Six
- Chapter Twenty-Seven
- Chapter Twenty-Eight
- Chapter Twenty-Nine
- Chapter Thirty
- Chapter Thirty-One
- Chapter Thirty-Two
- Epilogue

Table of Contents

Prologue
Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen
Chapter Seventeen
Chapter Eighteen
Chapter Nineteen
Chapter Twenty
Chapter Twenty-One
Chapter Twenty-Two
Chapter Twenty-Three
Chapter Twenty-Four
Chapter Twenty-Five
Chapter Twenty-Six
Chapter Twenty-Seven
Chapter Twenty-Eight
Chapter Twenty-Nine
Chapter Thirty
Chapter Thirty-One
Chapter Thirty-Two
Epilogue